# ONE GIRL FOUND

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Aug. 3, 1932

From

Carl

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*A Sequel to "Three Girls Lost"*

BY

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THREE GIRLS LOST

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# ONE GIRL FOUND

## CHAPTER I

MARCIA TALENT lay luxuriously on the couch in her apartment and thought about all that she had done to Chicago. She held a bank book in one hand and now and then she looked at the figures scrawled in small squares. Whenever she thought of the total she smiled. Across the room the door of her wardrobe was open and she could see rows of dresses, shoes ranged in order like small soldiers, hats . . . more clothes than a year ago she had ever dreamed of having, ever believed she would have. And to-day there would be five new dresses waiting for her at the shop, sent from the place on Michigan Avenue where only rich girls bought clothes. And then there was her interest in the shop, and there was the money that would be due her to-morrow in dividends on the money she had invested with Mr. Kaspar.

She had beaten Chicago. She had come to Chicago alone, without knowing anybody in the city, without anyone to help her. And she had made Chicago surrender. She had got what she wanted without giving up any of her beliefs, without any heartaches. She was free. No man ruled her, no man could tell her what to do. She took what she wanted from life and whatever she wanted was good.

She continued to smile at her own thoughts and for a long while she did not move. In the stillness of her

apartment the clock ticked softly, as if it was trying not to trouble her. The clock hands moved on and on. Now it was past ten o'clock, and she did not care.

Marcia Talent did not have to go to work on time. All over Chicago girls as pretty as she, as clever as she, were bending over typewriters, were waiting on people who stood in front of sales counters and shouted at them, were hurrying to answer the call of some man who ruled them for nine hours a day. But Marcia could sleep late if she chose, could go to work when she chose, could do as she pleased every day of her life.

She had gone as far as this in a year. And she was only beginning. All the tearful stories about Chicago, how hard it was on a girl, had alarmed her once. She knew better now and she could prove that the stories were wrong so far as she was concerned. Her bank book proved it. And the clothes. And . . . everything.

She yawned comfortably, like a small white kitten, rubbed her short nose, pushed back her light hair. By raising her head a little she could see her face in the mirror at the foot of the couch. A small face, round, like a child's. A face men looked at, where arrested by, adored. She knew all that. She had known all that ever since she was a small girl out there in Oregon, always being picked out to lead the march in school, always being chosen as the heroine in the school play. And men in Chicago were no different from men in Oregon, no harder to understand, no cleverer.

She smiled at herself in the mirror and yawned again, just to express her satisfaction. Then she got up and began moving about the room, trying on this dress, then that one, wondering which to choose, disappearing finally into the tiled bath, returning, dressing slowly.

She was ready to go out finally. She stood in front of the mirror and regarded herself for a long while. Yes. She looked even younger than she looked a year ago. Her face was a little thinner. She would have to be little careful or her chin would get too sharp, but that was all right. She would start a new diet if she needed to.

Now she would go to the shop and tell Mr. Kaspar she would take all of her money to-day instead of to-morrow. The dresses were coming and they would cost almost five hundred dollars and she had more than a thousand dollars coming to her. Everything she had put into the business and there were a couple of hundred dollars' profit already and now she was really a part owner. And three hundred and twenty-eight dollars and nineteen cents in the bank. She was rich.

She had come into Chicago by airplane with Edna Best and Norene McCann. They had roomed together at first, then—oh, a long time ago—Edna had gone back home, had given up. And Norene was married, living in a stuffy little flat, waiting on a man. On Gordon Wales. And happy, probably. But Norene was tied to Gordon Wales for life.

Marcia Talent smiled again at herself and nodded slightly, approvingly, saying to herself, "You're clever. You were the cleverest of the three and you were right in what you did. Nothing in the world matters but getting what you want. And you are getting what you want. You're right, old dear."

Then she went out to the elevator and the elevator boy spoke respectfully, and when she smiled he looked as if she had given him money. When she said "Good morning" to the clerk in her light child's voice he beamed and came out from behind the desk and opened the door for

her and said in his fluting tones, "Lovely morning, Miss Talent," and beamed some more. The doorman ran to get a taxi for her and smiled and wouldn't take a tip when she held out a quarter to him.

So she rode downtown, into the Loop. Into the Loop, which she had conquered and did not fear as she had feared it on that first night in Chicago only a year ago. She came to the building where part of a shop was hers and she walked into the shop like a queen.

But this morning something was wrong. She sensed that the moment she entered the door. Nobody hurried up to say, "Good morning, Miss Talent." She was the chief model and she was part owner, but nobody even looked at her.

Men and girls stood around the cashier's cage in a tight little knot and they were shouting, arguing back and forth, waving their arms.

She stood silent a moment, wondering what was the matter. Suddenly she was afraid. Trouble? But she had gone through so much trouble already. Ben Marriott's murder and the stolen clothes, the time Gordon was arrested and. . . .

Before she realized it she was running the length of the narrow shop. She grasped Mrs. Tate's shoulder, tugged at it, shouted into the din, "Mrs. Tate! What's happened? What's the trouble?"

Mrs. Tate turned slowly, looked at Marcia, smiled a wry sort of smile.

"Nothing," she said grimly. "Oh, nothing. Only Kaspar's skipped with most of the stock and all the money and the bailiffs are in already and Kaspar owed all of us. He got money out of everybody and all there was to show for what he owed us and the other creditors was the dresses and wraps. And he got away with all of that stuff last night."

Marcia felt the room rocking about her. She closed her eyes, opened them, gazed around wildly.

The cases along the walls, the glittering plate-glass cases that had held long, trailing, gorgeous evening gowns, and wraps and furs and bits of jewelry stood open and were empty. Even the plaques had been stripped off the walls. There was nothing left in the store that could have been moved in a van. Kaspar had done a thorough job. He had got away with fifteen thousand dollars' worth of clothes and ornaments and the shop was bare.

Marcia backed across the room, dropped into one of the narrow gilt chairs, sat there looking straight ahead.

An hour before she had said to herself, "You've beaten Chicago. You knew what you wanted and you got it. You're rich."

Now Kaspar was gone and her money and . . . and Kaspar had lied. She never had been a part owner, a partner. For she could hear what the others were saying.

The small dark model, who came in from the country six months ago and got a job, was shrilling in a thin voice like the note of a band saw, "He got every dime I had! every dime! Six hundred dollars I gave him for a partnership and he got away with all of it!"

And old Marty, the doorman, was booming, "He got a hundred and eighty out of me for a share in the business. Every nickel I had put away in the bank!"

And the others. Doraleen, with a crippled brother to support. Eddie, who ran the books and wanted to learn to be a designer. Carrie, the cloakroom girl. There was only one person in the room whose money was not gone with Kaspar. That was the bailiff, who stood inside the cashier's cage, saying patiently over and over, "Sorry. Sorry, but I can't do anything for you folks. I don't know anything about it. I'm just here to see that nothing else disappears."

"How'd he get away with everything?" the blond girl who modeled negligee demanded, desperately.

"Backed up a truck last night about midnight, apparently. The building watchman says he saw Kaspar come in about eleven-thirty, but of course he thought it was all right."

"Oh!"

Creditors were coming in now. Bedlam ruled. A smart shop yesterday, where—at least on the surface—business was good. Where smart women came to buy smart gowns. Kaspar was a good designer. Everybody admitted that. But he had left a wreck behind him. And Marcia had thought she owned a half interest in the shop! Marcia began to laugh. The laugh was high and shrill and not like her real laugh at all. And it went on and on. She couldn't stop. She did not want to stop. All this was funny, really. She must laugh or she would cry; if she should cry the tears would streak her face and people would laugh at her. Always, all her life, she had been afraid to let people see when she was hurt. She had to protect herself against that.

She stopped finally and stood up, holding her small purse. She felt something thin and square inside. Her check book. She still had money. She had money in the bank. And she could get another job. She was a good model and she was pretty and she had good clothes and enough money to keep going. She wasn't so badly off.

"I haven't got a cent. Not a penny. I had to walk home to-day. He didn't give me my check and I had to borrow money so my brother could get lunch to-day. Kaspar owed me two weeks' pay and now he's gone. And my rent's due. What am I going to do? I can't get another job right away. I haven't got a cent. . . ."

Doraleen. Poor kid. A sick brother to take care of

and a place for which she had to pay rent so he could get air and sunshine. And not a nickel to her name!

Marcia started toward the door. She might as well get out of there. Nothing she could say would help anybody. Nothing she could do would mean anything. They'd have to take it on the chin. She'd have to take her medicine like the rest. She wasn't really any better off than they because she needed to live better than they did.

But behind her she heard the dark model talking.

"I didn't eat at all last night or this morning. He had not paid me and I was out of money. I just had enough for my I.C. ticket. I come from away out on the south side. And . . . what am I going to do now?"

And the old doorman. He had a wife who wasn't well; he spent every cent he made taking care of her. And the others. . . .

There came over Marcia at that moment an emotion she did not recognize, a feeling that amazed her. For all at once she forgot about herself, she forgot she was Marcia Talent, who must fight the world; she thought only of these others, worse off than she had ever been, without her beauty, without her chance.

She turned back quickly.

"Listen!"

They stared incuriously at her small face, at her blond head, shining in the soft light from the front windows. What she said did not quite register with them at first. They were too stunned by the blow which had fallen to follow her rapidly spoken words. But she went on.

"I've got three hundred and something in the bank. I'll split that with you."

Carrie smiled at her.

"No. That's nice of you, Miss Marcia. But—no.

You got soaked just like the rest of us, didn't you?"

"Well . . . No. I've got some money left. And I want to—I want to help."

Doraleen sneered a litttle.

"Maybe you got your share before he pulled out?"

Marcia began, "I didn't—" but Carrie interrupted.

"That's enough out of you, Doraleen. Marcia's decent and she's trying to help. You lay off. You don't deserve any help, the way you talk."

Doraleen was silent, subdued. But the others told Marcia, "No. We couldn't let you do that." She grew impatient. She wanted to do a kind thing and they wouldn't let her. She had forgotten herself in the desire to help and they were not even decently grateful. Then . . .

She was standing beside Kaspar's desk. There was a bunch of paper wadded up beside one leg of the desk. She picked it up, smoothed it.

An envelope. An envelope with an address on it.

"Mrs. Olga Jessup, Clar—" That was all.

Jessup? The name meant nothing. But it was Kaspar's writing. What did it mean? Hurriedly, not hearing the others who were talking about what she had offered them, she ran across the room, got the telephone book, began scanning names and numbers. She found it.

"Mrs. Olga Jessup, Clare Towers Apartments, 1119 Pine Grove."

She turned to the others.

"Listen to me!"

They fell silent and faced her.

"Any of you ever hear Kaspar mention a Mrs. Olga Jessup?"

No one answered.

Then Carrie asked, "What was that last name again?"

"Mrs. Jessup. Olga Jessup."

Carrie smiled widely.

"Sure. That's a woman who used to work for him. I heard him talking to her on the phone one evening about a week ago."

"You did?"

"Yes. He thought I wasn't listening."

"Oh. . . ." Marcia thought quickly. Foolish of Kaspar. But that might be the answer. He was not really clever. She was sure of that. Then, "Come on!" she snapped suddenly at Carrie.

"Where?"

"I think I know where Kaspar has gone. I think. . . . Come on!"

"We ought to get a cop."

"A policeman couldn't do anything without a warrant. And we've got to hurry or he'll get away. Come on. You people wait till I get back!"

Marcia ran out of the door, Carrie following. They ran to a taxi parked at the curb and Marcia snapped, "Drive to 1119 Pine Grove. Fast!"

They sped up Michigan Avenue, then up Lake Shore Drive, past the tall apartments. To Addison. Across Addison to Pine Grove. North again.

Half an hour had passed. Traffic signals had halted them and Marcia fumed impatiently. Already she was sorry she had said anything. Already she was remembering another ride like this—the day Norene McCann made her go hunt Ben Marriott's gang. But she could not quit. Carrie, eyes shining, plain little face aglow with the excitement of adventure, looked at her admiringly, a loyal slave.

"Here y'are" the driver said.

Marcia paid him, then looked at the place. A two-story red brick house. Old. Not the kind of place

Kaspar would live in. He had an apartment downtown —it cost him two hundred dollars a month. He liked ornate places. This . . .

She stared at a window. She could have sworn she saw Kaspar's face.

"Come on!"

She raced up the steps. Carrie following. She hammered on the door. No answer. She looked around for a bell. At the side of the door a row of buttons had each a name below it. Mrs. Jessup? "Four rings." She pressed the button sharply four times. Nothing happened. Then she began to pound on the door with both her small fists, bruising them, not caring, not thinking of anything, but that Kaspar was inside the house. She was sure of it. And if Kaspar was here the clothes would be here.

The door opened.

A tall, sour-faced woman confronted her.

"What do you want?"

"I've got to see Mrs. Jessup right away."

"Why don't you ring her bell, then, instead of bothering people?"

"I did. She didn't answer."

"Then she ain't in." The woman started to close the door.

"No!" Carrie shouted at her. "You get out of the way, you!"

Her calloused hand, small and solid, pushed the tall woman out of her way. Marcia and Carrie ran into the dark hall, up the narrow, creaking stairs.

Second floor front, the card said. The flight of stairs was unbelievably long. Then Marcia saw the door. It stood open. Inside were boxes, piles of waste paper, nothing else. And as she ran toward the door she heard, in the alley behind the house, the roaring exhaust of a big automobile.

"See who it is!" she shouted at Carrie. "Back there!"

She ran into Mrs. Jessup's room. She saw a littered, tangled mass of papers, of boxes. She saw on a bed left as the people fled, a pile of dresses. Dresses from the shop. Things Kaspar stole. But only a few. The others . . .

"Kaspar!" Carrie shrieked. "He's in the truck. He's going away. Marcia!"

Marcia ran to the rear window, looked down. And as she leaned through the window, Kaspar, looking back, waved at her sardonically. Then the big truck sped down the alley, turned on to a cross street, disappeared.

No use following now. Kaspar had got away with most of the dresses, with the clothes that might have helped pay off the creditors and the people at the shop.

"We'll take what there is. Quick!" Marcia told Carrie. "Here." She piled fluffy silk and crêpe and georgette things into Carrie's strong little arms. She picked up other dresses, rolled them any way at all, made a big bundle, all she could carry.

"Anything left?"

They searched the room and the next room, moving with effort because of the loads they carried. Nothing else was there.

"Let's go, then."

At the foot of the stairs the tall woman waited.

"Where you going?" she demanded loudly.

"None of your business." Marcia said. "Get out of the way or I'll call a policeman."

"You'll call a cop! I guess maybe I will, though. Running in this way and stealing things out of a good roomer's place and——"

"Good roomer?" Marcia laughed lightly. "I don't think so. Ever hear what happens to people for receiving stolen goods? Well, if you want that to happen to you,

just try to keep me from taking this stuff back to the store it was stolen from. Get out of the way!"

Sullenly, the woman backed off, Marcia and Carrie reached the street, looked helplessly for a taxicab, saw none.

"Let's walk east to Sheridan Road," Marcia suggested. "We can get a taxi there."

"All right, Miss Talent."

## CHAPTER II

PASSERS-BY stared and smiled and an automobile came to a full stop while the driver watched Marcia and Carrie struggling with their loads of dresses. Marcia's face was burning. To be seen looking like this! Why hadn't she kept out of it in the first place? And when she got back to the store somebody would grab all the stuff. She wouldn't get any credit for what she had done. Not from anybody. The rest of the girls hated her, really. They always had. Why bother about them?

Carrie gave her the answer, then.

"You know, Miss Talent, you're pretty wonderful . . . you are. You know, I always thought you was . . . kinda stand-offish. You know—stuck up. But what you did to-day! Say, I'll bet every paper in town will have your picture in after this! I'll bet they will."

Marcia felt an odd pleasant thrill. It was nice to have another girl admire her. Most girls hated her at first sight. Most girls were envious and showed it and would do anything they could to make her uncomfortable. This was nice.

"Nonsense," she said. "Come on. Here's a taxi."

They stuffed the dresses into the vehicle as carefully as they could.

"It's not a robbery," Marcia said smilingly to the driver, who was watching them with astonishment. "Just taking back some dresses. Make it snappy, though."

"Sure thing, miss."

Now she was tired and a little ill. She shouldn't get so excited about things. It wasn't good for her. She ought always to be quiet and unperturbed. That was her style, really. But it was nice to feel that Carrie, sitting beside her, was staring at her out of adoring eyes; that Carrie would tell the others, "Miss Talent is swell. She sure went after that guy Kaspar." And the reporters would come to get the story. They would help her in getting another job. Publicity always helped. So it had worked out all right. Everything would be good after all.

She lit a cigarette, offered one to Carrie.

"No, Miss Talent, I don't smoke. I just never learned. Maybe . . . if you smoke, I'd like to try it, too."

"Better not, Carrie. It isn't good for you." She felt an added pleasure at being able to advise little Carrie. "Don't get a habit like this."

"Oh!" Carrie sat back, her face more adoring than before.

So they arrived at the shop. Marcia got out first, stood waiting. Carrie handed out dresses, more dresses, stacking them higher and higher in Marcia's arms. A crowd began to gather. And now people came out of the shop. The bailiff first, intent on the things Marcia carried. Then a creditor—a man who had sold silk goods to Kaspar. Then Doraleen and the others came.

"What in the world. . . . Where'd you get all that stuff?"

"It belongs to us. I found where Kaspar was, but he got away with most of the dresses. All except these. Hold the door open for me, will you?"

They stepped back, then followed Marcia and Carrie into the store in a loudly admiring retinue.

"How'd you ever do it, Marcia?" This was Doraleen, sneering no longer, ardently admiring.

"Just figured out where Kaspar might be and went and got the stuff," Marcia said briefly.

Someone was at the telephone, calling one of the newspapers.

"And this girl went out after him and almost caught him but anyhow she got some of the stolen dresses. Yes, she's pretty. Sure. Marcia Talent. You had stories about her before. Remember? You'll send a photographer, too? Swell."

So Marcia held court and waited. And when the reporters arrived, Marcia was ready for them, her blond hair newly combed, her face carefully made up, her smile soft and shy.

"Nothing at all," she kept insisting. "Anybody else here would have done the same thing only I happened to find the woman's name."

But she knew what they would write. She knew that to-night a million people would read about Marcia Talent, who tried to help her fellow employees, and turned over her money to them. So—and it may have been only kindness, it may have been the thought of a grand gesture, it was most probably a merging of both impulses—she said suddenly to the reporters, "There's one thing more."

"What, Miss Talent?"

"I've got over three hundred dollars in the bank. I'm turning that over for the girls to split up, so they'll have a little something to go on until they get new jobs."

"No," Carrie cut in. "No, Miss Talent, we wouldn't let you do that."

"But I'm going to. Here." She got out her check book, borrowed a fountain pen, began writing checks. The shop people stood back, silent; the reporters wrote notes busily on wadded sheets of paper. She wrote seven checks. "Here's one for each of you. Forty-five

dollars apiece. That's enough to keep you all going a few days, isn't it?"

"But, Marcia——"

"You can't do that. I wont take it."

"You can't afford it, Miss Talent. You won't have any money left."

She answered them all at once, and now she was quite sincere about what she said. She had forgotten the reporters and she was not making a gesture. These poor girls! She had so much more than they had. She could get a job in a hurry. But they couldn't.

"I can do it and here are the checks and I want you to take them. And I'll have plenty of money left."

Yes, she thought suddenly, you'll have plenty left! Seven times forty-five is three hundred and fifteen dollars. And that will leave you thirteen dollars and nineteen cents. And your hotel bill is due. And what if you don't get a job? But, she argued, you will get a job. Right away. Of course. And these girls. . . .

"Take it," she insisted. "Here."

She distributed the checks, and whatever they had said, however they had held back, they took the money now. She smiled inwardly. Of course they would. People with nothing to go on wouldn't refuse money. She felt superior to them, now. They didn't know how to say "Thank you," even. Doraleen was already disappearing toward the cloakroom, to get her coat and hat —ready to run home. But . . . well, it was nice to think she had helped a little.

The reporters said, "Hold it. That way. Giving the checks to Carrie. That's all the money you've got, isn't it, Miss Talent—what you're giving away?"

"I . . . Honestly, yes. But I'll get more. I can get a job in a hurry."

"You sure ought to, Miss Talent," one reporter said. There was honest admiration in his eyes as he looked at Marcia.

Then the old doorman stopped them all.

"Listen here," he said, "Ain't we got claims against Kaspar?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"What about these dresses Miss Talent got back?"

"Those go to us," a lean dark man said.

"Who're you?"

"I'm Elias Hindeman. I've got a bill against Kaspar for more than a thousand for silk goods. And we creditors will share the property, of course."

"You wouldn't have a nickel's worth if Miss Talent hadn't got the stuff back, would you?"

"No. But . . . "

"You're going to get some of your money back just because of Miss Talent, ain't you?" the doorman pursued relentlessly.

"Yes . . . But——"

A reporter cut in suddenly then.

"Listen here, Mr. Hindeman. Want to get yourself some good publicity, too?"

"I— What do you mean?"

"Come over here a minute."

They conferred in low tones. Then Hindeman nodded.

"Good idea," he said. "Miss Talent!"

"What?"

"If the rest of the creditors agree, I'll vote to turn over to you part of the stuff you got back in return for the money you put up to offset salary claims. What do you men think?"

They debated noisily, then more quietly. Then they agreed.

"That's right, Miss Talent," they said. "That's only fair."

Immediately they began giving their names and addresses, the names of their firms, to the reporters.

"Good advertising for us," Mr. Hindeman confided to Marcia. "And not so bad for you. You pick out the ones you can use."

Marcia thought quickly. There wasn't a dress there she would wear or could wear. All big sizes. But good stuff. And worth money.

"All right."

She ran through the pile of garments, pulling out one dress, then another. She made a small bundle of them.

"I've got eight dresses here," she said finally. "Is that all right?"

"I guess so," Hindeman said, eying one of the dresses —a particularly rich gown of black velvet—a little covetously.

"Sure it is," the reporter said.

Hindeman nodded. And then Marcia shook hands with Carrie and with the old doorman, and said to him, "Send up the bundle to my hotel, will you?"

"Sure, Miss Talent. Say—you're mighty fine. I'll tell my wife about you."

"Thank you, Mike. Good-by."

Marcia went out of the store, stood on the curb. And now she remembered what she had forgotten, had put aside, in the hurry to be kind. She had thirteen dollars in the bank and a quarter left in her purse and a couple of dollars at home in the change box. She owed the hotel a month's rent—she had planned to pay it to-day. She owed two big bills for clothes and the people would begin asking her for their money as soon as they learned what had happened. And . . . she had fifteen dollars and twenty-five cents, she owed the hotel one hundred

eighteen dollars, she owed the clothes people about two hundred dollars. She had to her name the clothes she had worn and the dresses she had bought to-day. Bought!

She thought then, "But I haven't eaten yet. No wonder I feel—funny." Automatically, she turned toward the smart tea shop next door. No. She'd have to find something cheaper for a while, now that she only had fifteen dollars and twenty-five cents. She ate in an off-the-arm place instead, coffee and doughnuts and a fruit salad. It wasn't much and she was really hungry. But . . . Marcia was remembering a year or two ago, before she came to Chicago, when she used to pay board back home and buy clothes on twelve dollars a week. She got by all right then. She could do it again, perhaps.

She was sorry about the dresses. She didn't have to turn over her money. She didn't owe those people anything. She was— "No," she said aloud, "I'm not sorry a bit. They needed it worse than I did. I can find something. I can sell the dresses. But I'd better go home and fix up before I start. And they'll be delivering the dresses soon."

She was going to take a taxicab. No. She couldn't afford it. For the first time in a good many weeks, Marcia Talent took a bus instead, rode up Michigan Avenue, thinking, planning, telling herself over and over, "It will be all right," thrusting out her small square chin, frowning so that the people who noticed her felt a little amused, as at a small white, fluffy kitten that takes on the airs of a tiger.

Now she was afraid. Suppose she couldn't find a job in a hurry? Suppose she got sick? Suppose—something happened? Where would she be then? She couldn't write her people—they'd reply, "We told you so. Here's money for your ticket home." She couldn't turn to Norene McCann—Wales her name was

now. Not any more. A year ago Norene would have insisted on helping. Now . . . now Norene had her husband and her home and Norene and Gordon wouldn't want to see her, wouldn't do anything. They would if she asked them, if she ate humble pie. She wouldn't do that. Nobody in the world should say to Marcia Talent, "I told you so."

The small chin thrust out more than ever. She smiled. She'd make it. She knew she would. And when she did——

Chicago! She stared at the buildings with a new feeling about them. She hadn't beaten them. That was wrong. They were so big and there were so many people in them, these buildings on Michigan Avenue. If those people, all the people in those buildings, could make their way in Chicago, could find places for themselves, she could find a place, she could make a place for herself. Of course!

Then she came to her corner and got off and the bus conductor helped her as bus conductors do not ordinarily help girls. And her disarming child's smile was pay enough to make the conductor smile for an hour afterwards. And she went into the door of the big hotel that she called home—for the Plankinton Club was a long way behind her now.

"Any mail?" she asked the clerk. It was a formula. Marcia didn't get letters. Nobody wrote her; her family even had forgotten to write for months. But the clerk would always answer, "There ought to be if there isn't," and then they would both laugh. Only this time the clerk didn't say it. He said rather curtly, "No. Package, though." He indicated a huge bundle swathed in brown paper. The dresses from the shop. Marcia smiled, a rather wry smile.

"Yes. Have the boy take them up." She started to

turn away. Then, "What's bothering you, Henry?"

"Nothing, Miss Talent. Only——"

"Only what?"

"Miss Talent, you remember the other night you came past the desk and you said you wanted some money?"

"Yes."

"I gave you——"

"Of course. And I forgot to pay you back. I'm sorry, Henry. How much was it? Five dollars?"

"No, Miss Talent. Ten."

"Oh! I'll write you a check." And she wrote the check bravely, without any emotion showing at all, but as her fingers made the figures she was thinking, "That leaves three dollars. Three dollars in the bank and two dollars upstairs. Five dollars and a lot of dresses and that's all! Five dollars!"

She handed him the check.

"I'm awfully sorry, Henry. How's the new baby?"

"Just fine, Miss Talent. Thank you."

"I'm the one who ought to say thanks. Jakie take the bundle for me?"

"Sure."

So small Jakie struggled to her room with the big bundle and she opened the change box and gave him a dollar tip.

Four dollars, now. With a sudden feeling of weakness, of helplessness, she saw the door close behind Jakie's grin. Four dollars and a lot of dresses and no job. Not so good. She would have to do something in a hurry. This afternoon. Right away.

## CHAPTER III

MARCIA took a bath and with a reckless gesture she used the last of the expensive bath salts Roger had given her. Roger? She hadn't seen him for a long time. He dropped out of sight after that evening when he tried to get sentimental and she said, "You're pretty young to do a Barrymore, sonny." That wasn't very nice. But he was young.

She lay down on the bed, wrapped in the new silk robe she had bought last week at Graham's. She closed her eyes.

She waked three hours later. Four o'clock. Too late to sell anything to anybody to-day. Too late to go out, And she was hungry. She dressed. She ate in the hotel dining room and the check was a dollar and ninety cents and she tipped Oscar, the waiter, fifty cents.

She went back to her room and sat down to think about what she ought to do. She had not yet got used to the fact that she had no money. Now that she'd written a check for two and a half to pay for dinner, she had fifty cents in the bank and a dollar and twenty cents to her name. You couldn't write a fifty-cent check. They looked funny downstairs when she cashed the check for two dollars and a half. And now——

She remembered the newspapers. She telephoned the desk. "Send up the papers, please."

"Sure thing, Miss Talent. Right away."

The boy appeared and she tipped him a quarter. That wasn't as much as she usually gave, and the boy showed

her how he felt by his suddenly fading graciousness. She couldn't help it. She said, "That's all."

Then she saw her picture in the papers. There was a long story about the girl who turned over all her money to help people who lost when the shop she worked for failed. A story about the girl who pursued the thieving owner and got back part of his loot. A story that would make a million people think for a minute about Marcia Talent. For a minute. And then they would turn to the story in the next column or to the cross-word puzzle or to a comic strip and when somebody the next day mentioned the name of Marcia Talent they would say, "Who's she? Never heard of her." Fame! Marcia remembered last year and the stories in the papers that said she was a heroine for saving Gordon Wales. And now Gordon was married to someone else and nobody remembered the story or the case. And to-morrow——

To-morrow, with these clippings in her hand, she would go to every shop she could think of and would sell those dresses. She tore open the bundle. They were lovely dresses. She spread them out on the bed. This purple thing—she wouldn't wear it, but some women want to wear purple with sequins—it was supposed to sell for a hundred and thirty-five dollars. She ought to get fifty dollars for it. And maybe forty dollars or so for the green one with the low back. And the others. . . . She made rapid calculations on a slip of paper. A thousand dollars worth of dresses, almost, and she ought to get back all she paid for them. And when she did——

She smiled and folded up the dresses carefully and read the newspaper stories again. Nice to be a heroine. Nice—she thought sleepily—to have people know who you are and to have them talk about you and say you did something good. Nice.

In ten minutes after that she was in bed and asleep.

She slept with the clippings under her pillow. That ought to bring good luck to-morrow.

The telephone rang sharply and Marcia moved a little, put out a small hand as though she were protesting, touched the telephone, was awake.

"Yes?"

"Nine o'clock, Miss Talent."

"Oh! . . . Thank you."

Nine! She should have been up two hours ago. She ought to be down right now. She should. . . . She stared at the pile of dresses with sudden distaste, with active enmity. As she got out of bed she kicked the dresses.

"I'll get rid of you to-day. You wait and see."

She bathed hurriedly, began going through the dresses in her closet. The gray? Not for this sort of job. Something arresting. Something that would make people watch her and listen when she talked about clothes. The white. White with a single touch of sharp color at the throat. More like it. And light stockings and the French shoes. And a close-fitting hat. Right! She surveyed herself carefully. Her eyes were puffy. She had slept too hard. Well . . . She worked at her eyes for a while. Better. She considered the dresses. But she couldn't carry them along. She'd have to talk about them. Or take a taxi. Of course— No. No taxis, now. Not with a bank roll of ninety-five cents. She'd have to go without them. Or— She could take two or three in a suitcase. Only it would look funny, walking into a shop carrying a suitcase. She didn't want to look like a peddler. She wouldn't do that.

She would. She'd have to. This wasn't the time to be proud. She'd take the—the black and the red because they were so different; and the green one. That was the best piece Kaspar ever turned out. Those three.

She packed them in her overnight bag, surveyed the room once more, looked in the change box. Three pennies. Enough for a newspaper. All right. She was ready for the big adventure.

She said "Good morning" lightly to the elevator boy.

"Morning, Miss Marcia. See your picture in the paper?"

"Yes, Vic. Like it?"

"Didn't do you justice, Miss Marcia. Them pictures never do."

"No. Made me look fat, didn't you think?"

"Not really. But it was a swell story. That was wonderful, what you did."

"Thank you, Vic."

She left the elevator with a warm feeling. Nice to have people read about you and then tell you about it. Made you feel important. And she had the clippings. If Vic noticed it the people downtown noticed, too. And that would help.

She said to the clerk, "Good morning, Henry."

"Good morning, Miss Talent." He stared at the suitcase.

"Oh," Marcia said, coloring, "just taking some things out to be cleaned. I'm not leaving you, Henry."

"I never thought anything like that, Miss Talent."

She thought, "But you did. You're wondering right now." She said aloud, "Have you got my bill ready, Henry?"

"Oh, sure. Right here, Miss Talent."

He waited, expectantly. She colored again. "I—I'll leave a check when I come in. That's satisfactory, isn't it?"

"Why— Oh, sure Miss Talent. Say, that was pretty tough, your shop going broke that way. Didn't—break you, too, did it?"

"Of course not. Why?"

"I thought— The story said——"

"Said I turned over all my money? That's what the reporter thought, Henry. I'm too smart to do anything as foolish as that."

"That's what I said—what I thought, Miss Talent."

"All right. I'll see you later, Henry."

She went out of the hotel door and the starter hurried up to take the suitcase.

"No," she said. "I'm walking this morning."

"But you oughtn't to carry that bag on a hot morning like this."

"I want to."

She brushed past the starter, swung resolutely toward the corner. And she knew he was watching her. Her cheeks burned. The elevator boy and the clerk and even the starter wondering about her. Saying things to each other. Sniggering over the unpaid bill and the way she went out carrying a suitcase. Maybe hinting she wouldn't be back.

She hated all that. She hated Kaspar and the people at the shop. She'd hated everything in the world.

She mustn't feel that way. She'd have to sell the dresses. She knew you couldn't sell things when you were angry, when you'd lost your grip. She tightened her hold on the sticky handle of the suitcase. Breakfast. That would help.

She ate wheat cakes and sausage and drank two cups of coffee and felt better. But the check was fifty-five cents.

She bought a newspaper and on the bus she looked at the want ads quickly, almost furtively. It must look funny to see a girl dressed as she was, carrying a suitcase and reading want ads. She put down the paper. Nothing there for her, anyhow. Ads for stenographers and girls

to clerk in stores and girls to sell things from house to house. Nothing for Marcia Talent.

Time to get off, anyhow. And that young man across the aisle was staring too much. He wasn't good looking. Well dressed, in a careless way. But with big ears and a thin mouth. And with gray eyes. She didn't like men with gray eyes, Marcia said to herself. They always looked too sure of themselves.

He got off the bus behind her and still he watched her.

She thought, "I'll ask him, 'Am I bothering you or do I look like your long-lost cousin?' " Then she thought, "Marcia Talent can't do things like that. Not any more."

She walked down the street and he was behind her. Trying a pick-up? No. Just watching her. As though he'd never seen anybody like her. She knew that look of adoring helplessness in men's eyes when they watched her. Men telling themselves, "She's so little and so pretty," and feeling sorry for her and all the time she was smarter than any of them. Men! She hated men. Kaspar! Men were like that. All of them. Gordon Wales and Kaspar and all the other men in the world. She didn't need to ask any man's help and she didn't want to know any men and she wished the young man would stop looking at her. But when he looked at her for the last time and turned in regretfully through the tall bronze doorway of the Stockton Building she was a little sorry. He had smiled once. Not at her. Just smiled. And when he smiled he looked so much like a little boy and he looked so gay and nice——

She didn't want to know any men. She wasn't interested. She told herself that again and she hurried into the building which was first on her list.

She came out again in five minutes and there were tears close to the surface. The owner was kind, friendly, more than courteous. She had read the stories about the shop

and about Marcia. But she said, "We couldn't very well sell stuff that people might think was stolen. See here. You couldn't take out the labels without spoiling that work. And if you didn't people would think maybe I —got some of the stuff Kaspar stole."

"Somebody'll be glad to get the dresses. They're good," Marcia said stoutly—trying to reassure herself.

"Maybe. But I wouldn't want them. Good day, Miss Talent."

So she tried another place. And there the story was the same. And it was the same at the third and at the fourth. So, at the fifth place, when the owner had said, "I wouldn't be interested; I can't even sell my own stuff these days," she asked suddenly, desperately, "Have you got a job for me?"

He stared at her, smiled a little.

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Well—I think——" He stopped, flushing.

"You think what?" she pursued.

"You been in the newspapers so much, Miss Talent. And—you know how people are. Now, my customers——"

She did not wait to hear what else he had to say. She marched out of his office and out of the store, the suitcase dragging down on her arm, her cheeks flaming, her eyes half blinded by hot, angry tears.

And it was noon. Time to eat. She was used to regular meals, to plenty of food. This restaurant? She was as far as the door when she stopped. You could not buy lunch with thirty cents in a restaurant like that.

She had a chocolate malted milk for twenty cents and the soda jerker tried to flirt with her. A malted milk wasn't enough. The chocolate tasted too sweet. She wanted food. She wanted real meat and a salad and

coffee. Everybody in the world was just going into a restaurant or just coming out. It seemed that no matter where she looked there were people at tables behind plate-glass windows eating. She had not known for at least a year what it felt like to be hungry. She had never in her life before come to a moment when, being hungry, she could not buy food. She was terrified: she felt the ghastly loneliness of the person who is hungry as well as utterly alone. Why did she turn over her money for those dresses? She didn't need to. Those people right now were better off than she was. And if she told them the truth they wouldn't believe it. They were sitting at lunch somewhere and laughing over food and saying, "What an act that Talent girl put on! And it didn't mean anything. She wanted publicity." Something like that.

She climbed the wide steps of the public library on Randolph Street and went into the newspaper room and tried to pretend she wanted to read the papers. Her feet burned. She shouldn't have worn those gray shoes. They were always too tight right across the instep. And she was tired, terribly tired. And the suitcase was heavy. She wanted to cry. She wanted to drop her head in her arms right there in the library and cry for a long time.

But she wouldn't. She'd sell those dresses. She could do it. Nothing could beat Marcia Talent.

## CHAPTER IV

MARCIA'S small jaw set firmly and she went out on Randolph Street again and up Michigan Avenue and tried to sell the dresses. She went to five places that hot afternoon and once she thought the sale was made, but when the woman called in her partner, a small fussy man with spats and a wide black ribbon on his glasses, he said, "No, Not those! They might be—might be——"

"Might be what?" Marcia demanded in a voice that was strangely cold and dangerous to come from so small a girl. "Might be stolen, you think?"

"I didn't mean that at all. Not at all. But—we just couldn't handle them. You see how it is."

"I see perfectly," Marcia said bitterly. And she went out on Michigan Avenue again. Might as well go home, she thought. There wouldn't be anybody else to see. Not at five o'clock. Might as well go back to the hotel and bathe and rest and try to forget about food and being penniless and all the rest.

She signaled the bus at Lake Street. She stepped from the curb, tripped, stumbled forward, the suitcase plunging out of her grasp, under a wheel of the bus.

A firm hand caught her arm, steadied her. She seemed to leap on to the bus step as the hand raised her gently. And the same hand swung the suitcase up beside her, and she looked up at the homely face she had seen that morning, and at a wide grin that suddenly made the face handsome and boyish and charming, and at level gray eyes that smiled and at the same time were sorry for her.

"You're not hurt?" he asked anxiously. His voice was deep and he said each word clearly. There was some kind of an accent in his words. Southern or western, she wasn't sure which.

"No," she laughed nervously. "No. Thank you."

"Glad I was there."

She started to give her dime to the conductor, but the man's hand was first. "Two," he said. "Going up on top, Miss? Cooler up there."

"I guess so."

She started up the curving steps, and he followed, carrying the suitcase. Just a pick-up, after all? She wasn't sure. He didn't seem to want her to go anywhere with him, didn't seem to want to know her name, even. Just smiled.

There were two seats only, one near the rear, one just back of the windshield. He put the suitcase down beside the seat near the rear.

"Good day," he said. He went on to the front of the bus and sat down and did not look back at all.

Marcia felt a little angry. After all, he didn't have to run away. Men didn't usually run away from her. Young men especially. And the way he looked at her. If he thought she was so pretty, why didn't he stand back here? Or anyhow say, "I hope I'll see you again some day." He could have done that.

Men! She hated all men. Men had insulted her today with their smooth denials, their refusals to take her seriously or to be businesslike with her. And Kaspar! She didn't care if this man didn't want to know her. She didn't want to know him, either. She had more important things to think about. She stared straight ahead, her eyes clouded with apprehension, with fear of Chicago and the people in Chicago and what Chicago might do to her. She did not see the young man get off the bus.

When she looked at the seat he had occupied, just before the bus reached her corner, he was gone. Without saying anything to her!

She got off the bus, feeling puzzled. Funny for a man to act that way. With her, anyhow. Men always wanted to know her name. Men were always saying, "Let me walk home with you?" But this man was different.

She rather liked him for it. She thought it was nice when a man helped you and didn't think that gave him the right to call you by your first name.

She was still thinking about him a little when she walked into the hotel lobby and saw Henry behind the desk, and saw him smile in anticipation.

"Evening, Miss Talent. Got your dresses back in a hurry, didn't you?"

"My dresses? Oh, yes. Got one-day service." She laughed and she knew the laugh was false and she knew he knew it, too. "Any mail?"

"None."

"Thanks," she said curtly. She hurried on to the elevator.

Then in a moment the door of her room closed behind her and she was in safe harbor. She could rest. She dropped headlong onto the bed, not even taking off her hat. Her eyes burned. If she let herself cry her eyes would be marked and puffy. She mustn't permit that. She had learned a long time ago that it was bad for her looks if she cried. And Marcia Talent mustn't cry, anyhow. Marcia Talent—was—was what? A girl alone in Chicago. Not even a very smart girl. Pretty. Not so terribly pretty at that. And what else? Not much, really. Not much— All at once the edge of Marcia Talent's arrogance was gone. The conceit she had built up in a year of soft living, of adulation, of "getting

by," faded, was gone. She was a very small girl, alone and afraid and she cried. She cried for a long time and she enjoyed it; it seemed to rest her. Now her nerves were quiet. And as soon as she began crying she realized that she had needed to cry for a long time.

She got up at last, somewhat refreshed. She bathed her eyes in cold water. She combed her hair slowly, carefully. She took a cold shower. She looked over her stockings. All the time she kept telling herself not to think about the time, about dinner. But it would not work. She was hungry. Her whole small body was hungry and she had no money and she would have to go without eating until she sold the dresses or got a job.

But she was hungry. She kept thinking about it. She caught herself imagining how fried chicken would taste. Or half a cold lobster. Or a thick cut of beef, with browned potatoes and thin meat gravy. Or even a club sandwich. A club sandwich with bright red tomatoes and the thin cool yellow of mayonnaise and the green of lettuce. Any kind of sandwich. A hot dog like the one she ate a long time ago at the county fair. Anything that was food.

She could have somebody take her to dinner. That wouldn't be hard.

Who?

Frank Coffman? No. He was in New York. He wouldn't be back until next week. Jerry Crowder, then? No. The last time he took her to dinner she said to him suddenly, "You know, Jerry, I hate you. I don't have to be nice to people like you any more. I've got my own money." She had risen and left the table and gone home. So he wouldn't be calling up and she couldn't call him. Not now.

Mr. Mittner? He was short and fat and had damp hands and in general he was not a man you would be

proud to walk into a theater with. But he had money. And he spent money. He was in love with her, really. He had been in love with her for about a year. Always waiting around on the chance that she would let him take her somewhere. Always asking if she didn't want him to get her an automobile or help out with money for the shop. Always saying, "Whatever I've got, you can have."

Why not Mr. Mittner?

With sudden eagerness, she picked up the telephone, called Mr. Mittner's number. The phone rang a long while. Then a voice said "Helloo-o-o-o!" dragging out the word, playing with it.

"Mr. Mittner? Jim?"

"Sure is."

"This is Marcia."

"I knew that. I'd know your voice anywhere. Where've you been keeping yourself, anyhow? Haven't heard a thing from you in two weeks."

"I've been . . . busy, Jim. I'm . . . sorry I didn't call."

"I know how it is, Marcia." She waited for him to go on, to hear him say, "I see your shop went broke" or "Sorry you lost your money." But he didn't say it. Maybe he hadn't seen the papers. Maybe he didn't know anything about it. That would make things easier.

"Jim . . . I want somebody to take me to dinner. To-morrow is . . . my birthday." That was an inspiration. But it was true. She had forgotten until this moment, but to-morrow she would be twenty-two years old. Twenty-two! "I'm growing up, Jim. I'll be twenty-two to-morrow."

"Really? I thought you were . . . nineteen."

"Nice of you, Jim. But I'm really an old woman

. . . I'm lonesome to-night, though. I'd like to go somewhere."

"Sorry . . . " There was authentic regret in his voice. "Listen, Marcia, I know it sounds bad, but it's the truth. I've got a business appointment to-night. An out-of-town customer. I couldn't make it to-night. I'd like to but I couldn't. I tell you . . . "

"That's all right, Jim," she said coldly. "I just thought you might like to see me. But if it's business . . . "

"I could break the engagement. I would . . . "

"Never mind. It's just as well, anyhow. I ought to stay in to-night and get some rest. I'm so very busy these days."

"But to-morrow night, then?"

"No, Jim. I'll be . . . busy to-morrow night. Good-by."

She hung up on his protestations. She lay down again, because there was nothing else to do. She slept and so she forgot hunger for a while. But she woke at midnight. Then she lay for hours staring out of her window, hearing the boat sirens far out on the lake, feeling the hot murmur of the city rise like a wind through her window, wondering, trembling a little, steeling herself for the morning.

And in the morning she hurried out of the lobby again, and this time the doorman stood where he was; he did not hurry to call a taxi for her, he did not even smile. She went past him feeling hunted, ashamed. She had a dime. Enough for coffee. She told the soda-jerker at the corner, "A cup of coffee with lots of cream." Cream is food, she thought. That will help a little. But the coffee only made her hungrier. She drank it as slowly as she could, trying to force herself to feel fed. It was no use. She was so hungry that she was weak, that

her head ached. She fought against the ache, against a wild sudden desire to cry or to seize one of the thick French doughnuts from the glass dish in front of her. She went out of the store carrying the suitcase, and slowly—very slowly—she walked downtown. As she passed the Stockton Building she looked around almost unconsciously. She might see the young man. He worked in an office there. Probably a bookkeeper. What they called at the Plankinton a "junior executive," because it sounded better. But she didn't see him. She walked on. She tried to sell the dresses. There was no one who wanted them. She couldn't pawn them for a few dollars. Stubbornly, she held to the belief that eventually the dresses would be important, that eventually she would find a use for them.

She asked for a job. But there were no jobs. And finally at twelve o'clock she surrendered. She went home, she hurried past the clerk and locked herself in her room and tried to read but could not, and tried to sleep but could not, and at last simply sat staring out of the window. Until finally it was six o'clock. Then she called Jim Mittner.

"Jim?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"This is Marcia."

"Oh. . . ." There was a very long pause. Then, "What's the word, Marcia?"

"I've changed my mind. I'm not going anywhere to-night. Do you . . . ."

"Why . . ." There was a long pause again. Then, "Sure, Marcia. I want to see you to-night. Sure I do." But the heartiness in his voice was forced. She could feel that. He knew, now. He knew she was up against it, was penniless. He had changed already. And now she wanted to shout at him, "I don't want to see you. I

can't bear being with you. I hate you!" But she said nothing of the sort. She said instead, sweetly, "What time will you call for me, Jim?"

"Why . . . whenever you say."

"Seven?"

"Well. . . . Sure, seven."

"Good-by."

She called the desk then.

"Will you tell Mr. Halloway I'll have the money for him to-morrow?"

"The money? Oh—you mean on your bill?"

"Yes. Of course. I had to wait until things were straightened out at the shop, but—just tell him I'll have the money to-morrow."

"You bet I will, Miss Talent. Thanks."

She hung up and sat back in the chair. And on Marcia Talent's small childish face there was a look now that was not at all childish. She was forgetting her hunger and forgetting everything but a great burning resolve. Men were responsible for her having no job, for her not getting back the money she deserved, for her having no share in a profitable shop, for her being hungry. Men!

"I'll get even," Marcia Talent told herself. "From now on every man is fair game and I'll get what I need. You see if I don't."

Then she prepared herself for the first move in her war against men.

## CHAPTER V

But Mittner did not buy a big dinner. He said as Marcia and he drove away from the hotel (having handed a dollar bill to the doorman, who bowed to Marcia now and smiled obsequiously), "Listen, Marcia. Just because it's your birthday I've planned a very special party. We'll eat later. We'll just get a sandwich now. To-night I'm buying champagne to celebrate your birthday. You'd like that better, anyhow."

So she could not say anything. She could not let him see that a sandwich was not what she wanted, she could not let him realize that she looked covetously at the thick porterhouse steak the woman at the next table was eating so uninterestedly. She, too, must seem uninterested in food, interested in champagne, interested in Mittner. Her head ached and she felt faint, and it seemed that sometimes she could not hear what Mittner said. But she smiled brightly, she laughed with a forced appearance of delight, she flattered Mittner. She said, "Yes, that's all I want to eat now."

She was so hungry she would have walked anywhere for food, and instead she rode in a limousine to the door of the club on Ontario Street. Down the street she could see the building in which she had roomed with Norene McCann and Edna Best, had stayed the first night she was in Chicago. She turned away quickly. She did not want to remember those days. She wanted to forget the Marcia Talent of a year ago.

So she entered the club like a small radiant queen, and she knew that people were watching her, that men envied Mittner, and she sat down at a table next to the dance floor, and Mittner said, "Champagne. Very cold. This is a celebration." He turned to her. "There will be a couple of boys along from the office after a while," he said. "To dance with you. I thought you'd like that."

"I do. You're so good to me, Mr. Mittner. Always."

He beamed proudly. "Sure, why not? Anything money can buy I'll get for you."

"Yes," she thought bitterly. "Anything . . . but food."

But she laughed. She told him about the shop, and she made it a joke. She wished he wouldn't laugh so loudly. She wished he wouldn't slap her on the arm with his heavy hand—like a bear pawing at a kitten—when he laughed. But she made it all a joke.

"It doesn't worry me any," she insisted.

"You're all right, then?"

"Of course I am."

"I thought maybe you lost all the money you'd saved up. You used to show me your bank book and tell me all about it, you know . . . I even thought maybe that was why you called me up."

"Mr. Mittner!"

She turned away from him, hating him now, despising his crassness—his cleverness. He was right and she hated him for that. He was apologetic now, afraid he had hurt her, abject in his apologies, and she hated him for that. So he sought peace in the only way he knew. He ordered more champagne, although the first bottle was still half full, although Marcia had not touched her glass.

"Really cold this time," he said curtly.

So the waiter brought another bottle, wrapped in a thick cloth, and set the bottle in a bucket filled with ice.

And Mittner signed another check.

The place was crowded, full of noise. The lights were small dim excavations in the gloom. The dance floor was no bigger than the floor of her hotel room; the orchestra was pinned against one wall, suspended in space; there were people at all the tables and she felt that most of them were watching Mittner and the people who stopped to talk to him. And watching her. She could see women look over at her and then tighten a little and begin to wonder about themselves, and she saw one girl look at her, then bring out a small mirror and begin to fix her hair. She could see that men who a moment before had stared at their girls as though there could be no one else in the world now were looking sidewise at her, comparing her with their girls, wishing . . . well, wishing they were in Mittner's place.

And that was not all. Mittner was the only man who was buying champagne. He was buying it for her.

She had read about parties like this when she was at home, back in Oregon, dreaming about Chicago. She had come to Chicago thinking that some day she might be the heroine of a romance with wealth and adulation in it. And now there was something missing, there was not the gayety she had dreamed of, there was only a faint tickling feeling in her nose when the champagne bubbles rose from the glass, there was a sour taste (she had always thought champagne would be sweet), there was a feeling of dread. And she was terribly hungry.

Perhaps she should simply say to Mittner, "I want to eat." But she couldn't. He had said a few minutes ago, "There will be a couple of boys along after a while. To dance with you." She couldn't ask for food now. She wouldn't ever take anything from a man again—by

asking. She'd get things with her brains. It was war from now on.

The woman at the next table ate a thick steak and it seemed to Marcia that the woman was mocking her, that the woman knew she was starving.

She could put one of her small hands on Mittner's thick arm and say in her child's voice, "I'm awfully hungry." But—she wouldn't say it. She wouldn't ask favors of him, or any man. She wouldn't give him that hold on her.

Her little head rose. No she wouldn't ask him to buy food for her. If she had money of her own she wouldn't mind asking for food. But not now. Not when she was a beggar. No job. No money. And the hotel bill. And——

"You're not drinking," Mittner complained. "Don't you like the party? I wanted to do something extra nice for you. That's why I'm getting champagne."

"Of course I like it, Mr. Mittner. Don't be silly. You're always so—so nice to me."

"Sure. Who wouldn't be?"

She drank a little. She heard the orchestra only faintly. She was thinking too much. To-morrow—she would better not worry about to-morrow. Not until she had to. And she was listening to the people. That helped her to forget she was hungry. She heard a girl in red sob faintly, as she danced past, sob and whisper to her young man, "And I won't ever see you again!" She heard a girl with deep lines from her eyes to her mouth —the mistress of ceremonies, from Tex Guinan's show, they said—telling a fat man from New Mexico, "You're the best sport I ever knew. A real old-time guy!" She knew the girl was lying, knew it was her business to lie, despised her. But was there very much difference between the girl and herself? The girl there on the

dance floor was paid to lie to men and get them to spend money, but she didn't deny it, you knew what she was. But how about Marcia? She was— No. That wasn't so. She didn't take anything from men. She never had. She was pretty and if they wanted to take her places she would go, but she didn't owe them anything.

Why should she not marry Mittner? The thought blazed through her mind suddenly. It was simple enough. Let him ask her to marry him. Then go through with it. Have plenty of money and a home and be happy. Be taken care of.

No. She shook her head. No. She wouldn't do that.

And Mittner saw her small head move, looked concerned, leaned toward her solicitously.

"Trouble?"

"No. Nothing."

"That's good. That's swell, Marcia. You have a good time. That's what I want to be sure about, that you have a good time. That . . . Oh, here come the boys now."

He pointed across the dark room. She saw two lean young men, somehow much alike, undistinguished, their hair plastered down, looking almost too much scrubbed.

"I told you. They work for me."

"Yes. I remember."

Mittner stood up. He was only about five feet three inches tall, and he was heavy. He was only three inches taller than Marcia and it was hard for a girl to think a man was important when he was as small as that. But the boys were afraid of him. They stood respectfully, their eyes fixed on him, not even looking toward Marcia, when he grunted, "Dana Colby, Charles Maloney, meet Miss Talent. Marcia, this is Dana and Charles."

"Hello," she said, and smiled with the smile she re-

served for unimportant people being introduced. "So glad you boys could come."

"So are we," the Colby boy said.

"Yeah. We are, too," the Maloney boy said.

They sat down. But Mittner said, "Dana, you ought to dance with Miss Talent. She's a good dancer." There was something peremptory in the casual words. Dana got up precipitately. "Would you like to dance, Miss Talent?" She thought, "I'm not right. I'm—shaky. I—oh, I've got to have something to eat." But she said, "Very much, Dana." So they danced.

They circled the floor once, then again. Dana didn't need to hold her so tightly. She pulled away a little. He looked down at her. She thought, "If he dared, he'd like to make love to me. He's the type. But—he's afraid." She felt a faint contempt. Well . . .

She shouldn't be dancing. Her head swam. It wasn't the champagne. She was sure of that. She had only drunk one glass, really. She had poured the rest of it into Mittner's glass and he didn't know the difference. It was food she needed. She hadn't eaten anything but a sandwich in twenty-four hours and . . . the hotel. . . . She mustn't think about that.

The music took on a new harsh, broken tempo. The dancers moved with an odd, jerky rhythm. This was rather fun. She almost liked it. There was something tremendously exciting about running a race with music, about being in time no matter what the music did.

Dana whispered then, "I think he wants us. Let's quit. Come on." He started away, leaving her standing. She followed. People were watching her. She could feel it. She seemed to reel a little. People would think she was drunk. She could feel them sneering about it. She hated Mittner for his stupidity. Why didn't he

understand? Why didn't he order food now? She had to eat. Nothing in the world was important now but food.

She was small and blond and very lovely, the kind of girl men think of as a child to be protected, to be fed lightly on delicate things. But just now she was as primitive as a cave woman. She wanted to eat and she must eat or she was going to faint.

And Mittner was smiling. She hated him for that. There was something horrible in the way he smiled at her while she was starving. Carefully, deliberately, she sat down facing him across the table, ignoring the chair beside him. He stood a moment, not sure what to do. Then he sat down also, and leaned across the table staring at her.

"You've been gone a long while," he said finally.

"I like to dance. I don't get much chance to dance any more. I'm so busy now."

"I know." He was being sorry for her again. Well, that was all right. If he kept on being sorry for her he wouldn't be hard to handle—he would do what he was told.

## CHAPTER VI

MITTNER beckoned to the mistress of ceremonies.

"Marcia, this is Teddy O'Brien. She used to be with Texas Guinan. I know Texas, you know. . . . I know her well. Don't I, Teddy?"

"You sure do, Mr. Mittner. Yes, sir, you sure do."

"Teddy, this is a little girl from the country. Doesn't look it, does she?"

"No, sir, Mr. Mittner, she sure doesn't."

Marcia thought, "You'd agree with anything he said. He's buying champagne at twenty-five dollars a bottle, so he's the king for to-night. And after the place closes up you'll all laugh at him and to-morrow you'll hurry over to the bank to be sure his check is good. I don't blame you. But I hate you for it. And you've got me sized up. You know how much this dress cost and you know how old I am and you know—you know everything in the world about everybody as soon as you look at them." And she thought, "It must be awful to be like you. You only look young when the light doesn't touch you. You've . . . you've seen to much."

She said, "Oh, but I am a country girl. I'm new to all this. Tell me about it, won't you, Miss O'Brien?"

"Call me Teddy. . . . Tell you about what?"

"These people. That big man you were dancing with . . . the one who sat on the piano with you a while ago."

"He's a big give-and-take man from New Mexico. Comes in three times a year to paint the town. Always comes here first. Spends all the money he's got and wires

home to his wife for a ticket back. And the poor sap always sends him money."

"Oh!"

Marcia looked around the room. This had been a private home once, and the man who made it into a club had done little to change the old building; he had only knocked out partitions here and there and put down a new floor and painted bad pictures on the wall and hired a few out-of-work entertainers and got some liquor. That was all.

The fat man from New Mexico winked at her.

She turned away, indignant, and said, "Why doesn't he stay home with his family? What does he get out of all this?"

"Well— What do you get out of it?" asked the O'Brien woman.

"I— Oh, nothing. But I don't think that man enjoys it."

"That's his own hard luck. Anybody who plays this game hasn't got any sympathy coming to him. Not from me, anyhow."

"That's right," Mittner said. "A man like that doesn't deserve anything. It's his own fault if people play him for a sucker."

Dana nodded in agreement and then Charles nodded. The O'Brien woman said, "You know what you're talking about, Mr. Mittner. You've seen plenty of 'em in your day. Plenty." And Mittner beamed at that. But Marcia thought, "She's sneering at him and at me, too. And I'm like—like—" No. That wasn't fair. She was just nice to Mittner. She didn't make him spend money. He liked to spend money so she'd go out with him. He had a lot of money. She wasn't——

"Let's dance," Mittner said.

She got up, holding the back of the chair. She was

weak. She shouldn't be dancing. She had to have food. And he didn't say anything about ordering dinner; he seemed not to care if he ever ate. Or if she ate——

They began to move around the dance floor slowly, awkwardly. He was the sort of bad dancer who thinks he is a good dancer and clever. He kept putting in funny little hops and steps and jerky turns, which he thought were young. He was always bumping people and their move around the floor was a succession of "I'm sorry" and "Pardon me, friend." And all at once the music died out on a single crying note from the trumpet, and they stood still.

Marcia felt the floor go out from under her. She caught desperately at Mittner's arm. He misunderstood. He smiled fatuously.

"Like me?"

"I—" She fought to keep the blackness away from her eyes. "I'm— You know I like you, Jim."

"That's good."

"Hello, Mittner," a voice said over Marcia's shoulder. She turned and saw a white-haired man with a young face, a man taller by almost a foot than Mittner, good looking, well dressed. The girl with him was blond, and tall, too. "But not blond like me," Marcia thought. "She does things to her hair." She could tell even in the gloom.

"Why, hello, Grant." Mittner seemed embarrassed. Marcia could not see why he should be embarrassed. And—this man was nice looking. He looked jolly and friendly. He wasnt at all like Mittner.

"May I—" The man waited. He was staring down at Marcia, forgetting all about Mittner. There was a long pause. The music was going to start again. Marcia wondered why Mittner didn't introduce her. That was what Grant was waiting for. Of course——

"Oh—um—yes," Mittner said slowly. I'm sorry, Marcia. Miss Talent, this is Mr. Grant. A—a friend of mine from downtown."

"I'm very glad to know you," Marcia said. She gave him her small hand. His hand felt cool. His fingers closed around her hand tightly. He had square white teeth and a very straight, thin nose. He looked a little as Barney Sherry used to look in the movies. She thought he was probably a gentleman.

"Come on," Mittner said hurriedly. "Let's dance."

He held her more tightly, now, and pushed her a little. But Marcia was not really dancing, she was only following Mittner, telling him now and then, "You dance so well, Jim," wishing it was over, glad—very glad—when the clarinet made the funny squealing noise that meant, "That's all of this dance."

She held Mittner's arm tightly on the way back to the table. He smiled about it, pulled her arm against him. He thought it meant she wanted to hold on to him! Easy to fool a man, Marcia thought dully. Easy. Too easy. . . .

She almost dropped into her chair. Dana and Charles were standing, waiting respectfully. Neither of them offered to help with her chair. Mittner did that. And he sat down close to her. He was breathing heavily. His face was flushed and he dug out a large white handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

"Hot," he said.

"Yes," Marcia agreed. "It is quite warm."

"Terribly hot."

"Yes," the O'Brien woman agreed. "The band is hot, too. Don't you think so? I'm pretty proud of my boys."

"They're very good," Marcia said politely. Why didn't

Mittner order food? Why didn't he see? She wouldn't ask him. She couldn't do that. But . . . but why didn't he see?

A light went on over the dance floor. A waiter wheeled out a small painted piano. The O'Brien woman jumped up, flashed a smile at Marcia and at Mittner, and hurried out on the floor. The chatter of voices faded into a low murmur. The woman climbed on the piano, sat on the top, her head thrown back, a fixed theatrical smile on her face.

"Now we start our little show," she called in her sharp voice. "Papa, come on up here and give the little girl a big hand!"

Like an obedient elephant, the fat man from New Mexico got up, stepped into the harsh pool of light. The woman patted the piano top, beside her. The man climbed up, with effort, dropped heavily beside her, grinned emptily.

"He's not even really drunk," Marcia thought. "He actually thinks she wanted him up there. He thinks people like him. But nobody does. Nobody likes anybody in this place."

The woman on the piano reached around to the orchestra stand, picked up a wastebasket, took out of it a handful of small wooden clappers, began tossing them around to people at the tables.

"Let's make big noise! Let's all have a real good time. Let's have a lot of noise! Come on!" She began to pound on a table top with two of the little clappers and here and there an awkward, self-conscious man or a giggling girl hammered with a clapper almost in time with the music. And out of the other room appeared a big woman who danced—who danced in a way Marcia suddenly felt she did not care to watch. And after that there were two thin girls who sang, and they turned

carefully to face first one table, then another, singing over and over in their flat voices:

"A little kiss each morning,
A little kiss each night."

Marcia picked up the oddly shaped glass with the thick, hollow stem, and watched the bubbles rising in the champagne. Her hands were shaking. Her shoulders felt cold, then suddenly very hot. Her head ached so that she knew she could not stand it much longer. She must . . .

"Drink it," Mittner said.

Obediently, dazed, she swallowed some of the champagne. She tasted it again. It was not so sharp, now. "Good," she told Mittner, making her child's grin wrinkle her small nose. "Awfully good. Thank you, Jim. I always wondered what . . . what champagne tasted like." He glowed. But he didn't say anything about food. Until the boy Dana said in a low voice, "Hungry, Charley?" and Mittner stared at them, almost glared.

"No. No. Not a bit," Charles said quickly.

"We don't want to eat yet," Mittner said. "That would spoil all the fun. You shouldn't ever eat when you're drinking champagne. That's wrong. That spoils everything. I always said you shouldn't ever eat at all when you are drinking champagne. I always said that."

Drunk, Marcia thought. Just a little. As drunk as he ever gets. Just drunk enough so his face gets red and his hands are heavier than ever. And he keeps staring at me. I wish he wouldn't. I wish . . . Why didn't he order food? She didn't want champagne. She wanted to eat. She hadn't eaten for so long. . . .

Mittner patted her small hand with his large hand, looked at her oddly. He beckoned to the waiter. Food! Marcia thought. Food! No. He told the waiter, "Bring

another one." The waiter brought another bottle, swathed in soaking cloths, and Marcia heard the sharp "Pop!" faintly, as though from a long way off.

Mittner put the glass in front of her again, filled.

"Drink it. You're spoiling the party, just sipping that way."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mittner." She drank a little, set down the glass. The glass tilted in her hand, the champagne spilled, seemed to leap at her, spilled on her dress.

"Why . . ." Mittner stood up, solicitous.

"Never mind," she got out. "Never mind. Didn't do any harm, Jim. This is . . . just an old dress."

"That's not so. It's brand new. You think I can't tell?"

"Anyhow, it didn't hurt the dress."

"All right, baby." Baby! She hated it and hated Mittner and she wished she was home, home in her room. Her room? But it wasn't hers. Not unless she paid the hotel a hundred and twenty dollars. A hundred and twenty. . . . A hundred and twenty. . . . A hundred and twenty. . . . It made time with the music. A hundred and twenty!

She giggled like a little girl. And Mittner smiled a little.

"Like it?"

"Yes. Oh, yes, I like it." Like it. A hundred and twenty. . . . A hundred and twenty. . . . Why didn't he order food? Why didn't he? A steak and potatoes and coffee and. . . . A hundred and twenty. . . . A hundred and twenty. . . .

Mittner was scowling. His face resolved itself out of a strange sort of haze and she could see he was looking at her angrily. No, not at her. Past her. She turned her head. Her head felt light. It turned so quickly she was almost afraid.

Grant was standing behind her. His hair looked very white in the darkness. Very white. A hundred and twenty. . . . A hundred and twenty. . . .

"Hello, Jack," Mittner said. "Sit down. Have one with us."

"Don't care if I do. You're surely buying 'em out to-night, arent you, Jim?"

"Yes. . . . Twelve bottles so far. Twenty-five a bottle. It's a special party for Miss Talent. You see she never tasted any champagne, so I fixed it up so she could taste a lot of champagne and she likes it. You like it fine, don't you, Marcia? Don't you?"

"Yes. Yes, I like it. Of course, Mr. Mittner."

"Mr.?"

"Jim. Of course I like it." Why didn't he tell the waiter to bring something to eat? Could she hold up her head any longer? The ache was terrible now back of her eyes and her face was taut and her hands ached, they were so cold. She couldn't stand it any longer.

Mittner raised his glass, toasting Marcia. And Grant raised his glass also, looked at her over its brim, out of deep eyes that seemed to smile only at the corners. Marcia bowed, stiffly. It was hard to move her head. If she moved her head too far forward she couldn't raise it again.

"You're so nice to me, Mr. Mittner. So nice." Her voice came from clear across the room. She wasn't sitting here, she was sitting over there. Sitting with the fat man from New Mexico. With the fat man and the O'Brien woman. Sitting on the piano over there and this wasn't her voice because it didn't sound like hers and it wasn't hers and she was starving.

With a small sob Marcia slid off the chair, fell face downward on the floor, lay crumpled like a flower that had been stepped on. Her party was over.

## CHAPTER VII

When Marcia opened her eyes, she saw Grant's thin face above her, his white hair smooth, his eyes tender and very kind. And his arm was around her, he held her up from a couch, he was saying over and over, "You poor little thing! You poor little thing!" And she heard Mittner's loud voice, shouting, "Let me in there. Get out of the way, Grant!" And Grant answered quietly, "Go on away. If you can't take care of a girl better than this, you don't deserve to be with her."

There was a hubbub of voices. She could sense people around her, many people, asking what had happened, offering suggestions, arguing.

She was not in the room that she remembered.

She liked the feel of Grant's arm under her shoulders. His arm was lean and hard, muscular, not thick and soft like Mittner's.

She closed her eyes again. When her eyes closed wearily she was even more as a little child asleep. There was no man in the room who would not have helped her willingly.

Then she opened her eyes slowly and looked at Grant for a long moment that somehow seemed breathless. That made her a little afraid, so that she smiled, because she mustn't let him know how she felt. It would never do to let a man know how you felt at a moment like this.

He said, "Poor little thing!"

Her laugh was tremulous. And not because of the weakness that held her. Because . . . because of his

eyes and the way he bent over her. And because he was keeping Mittner away. Mittner's fat voice would have troubled her.

"You said that before," she told him, trying to make her voice sound mirthful. "And I'm not so little. I weigh almost a hundred and five!"

He laughed softly.

"Trying to be funny when you're . . . What happened, child? What made you faint? You passed out all at once. Not the . . ."

"The champagne?" Her laugh tinkled lightly. "No. I only drank a little champagne, Mr. Grant. It was . . ." She flushed and was silent.

"What?"

"Well . . . I was hungry. You see, I . . ." She flushed again.

Grant laid her down carefully. She realized now that she was on a couch in the anteroom. Now Grant was pushing the people back, and the manager was helping him, saying to the people, "It's all right. The girl just fainted. Nothing wrong. Please go and sit down." So in a moment the door closed, shutting out the café and the music, and there were only Mittner and Grant and Dana and Charles left.

"I can take care of Marcia, all right," Mittner said. "That was nice of you, Jack. I don't see why you had to pick her up, though. I was going to . . . I . . ."

"You're not going to do much of anything, Jim," Grant said quite gently.

"What?"

Mittner's face was purple. His eyes were angry now, small and glittering in his fat face. Marcia thought he was going to hit Grant.

"You're going to get out," Grant said steadily.

"I don't think so. Say . . ." Anger was growing in

Mittner. He pushed forward, his chest out, his face working. "Say, Jack Grant, you listen to me! I brought this girl here and you don't even know her and you needn't think you can butt in like this. You better beat it or else I . . ."

"Or else you . . . what?"

Grant's voice kept getting lower and lower, Marcia thought. And more and more dangerous. His face changed now. He looked hard and cold as ice. She must do something. She couldn't let them fight. She couldn't let Mittner be like this. She had come here with him. She had thought just a few minutes ago that she was going to marry him. And . . . well, she didn't know Grant. Mittner was right about that.

She got up. Her legs were weak under her, but she was brave now; she managed to stand, to rush across the room, to get between them. She laughed, but there was a strange note in her laughter; it was not real.

"I wish you wouldn't argue," she said. "I wish you'd just . . . just get me something to eat. You see, I . . ." She swayed a little. Mittner caught her arm. She drew away. She tried to look at them both, not to let Mittner feel she really wanted not to look at him. She went on, "I haven't eaten anything but a sandwich all day. The shop, you see . . . Well I haven't got any money, Jim. That's what was worrying me. And I . . ."

"You haven't eaten? And you wouldn't tell me? You wouldn't say you wanted some food? You know I'd buy you . . . I'd buy you anything in the world."

"I know. But I couldn't ask you for food. I couldn't do that, Mr. Mittner."

He smiled. And Grant smiled. They had forgotten they were enemies. All they were thinking was that here was a brave little girl who wouldn't take charity from

a man, who wouldn't ask for help when she needed it. They were feeling a kind of warmth that made them think anything in the world Marcia said was right and beautiful. And both of them faced the door, where Charles and Dana stood, their hands dangling, their faces vapid.

"Go on home." Mittner said to Charles and Dana.

"Yes, sir. We'll see you . . . see you to-morrow."

"Go on."

"Yes, sir."

Dana ducked out of the door like a startled rabbit. But Charles turned with an effort of bravery and gulped. "Good . . . good night, Miss Talent!" She smiled graciously and answered, "Good night, Charles. It was nice to meet you." He grinned, ducked out of sight and the door closed.

Then there were three of them. Marcia had one hand on Mittner's arm and one hand on Grant's arm. She was drawing them together, queening it over both of them . . . feeling proud, somehow, like a heroine in a play. For here were two men and either of them would do anything she wanted them to do. They were big men and they had money and she was very small, with not a cent in the world, and she owed money to the hotel, and . . . And they would take care of her. They would fight to see who should be allowed to help her. They would help her without any expectation of any kindness in return. She . . . she could make them do anything. . . . Marcia stood like that, thinking that, but her face was smooth and quite innocent and childlike. And Mittner thought as he watched her, as the violent color receded slowly from his face and his breath came more evenly, as his anger went out of him, "She came with me. She's really my girl. Grant can't do anything about it!"

So they both said loudly, "Waiter! Waiter!" and a startled bowing man sprang through the door.

"Food," Mittner said grandly. "Lots of food. And a table. And chairs right away. And an electric fan. And some . . ." He looked at Grant sourly . . . "And some champagne."

"Never mind the champagne," Grant said. "A steak for the lady. The best steak in the house. And—right away—a big plate of consommé. Clear. And a salad. Just lettuce and tomatoes and romaine dressing. And coffee. Then the steak. Well done. Very well done. Then . . ."

"I'm ordering this meal," Mittner cut in.

"No. I am."

"No. I am."

Marcia interposed, softly, appealingly.

"You're both so nice. And I feel so . . . I'm afraid I'm pretty shaky. I wonder if . . ."

Again they were her slaves. And she knew it. Mittner pushed a chair forward, and she sat down. Grant hurried across the room to a tall white water cooler, drew a glass of water, brought and handed it to her. She drank daintily, only a little, handed back the glass, said, "Thank you, Jim. Thank you, Mr. . . ."

"Won't you make it Jack, too? It's a very easy name to remember." He looked like a small boy. That was odd. He had white hair and he was not really young. But he was not as old as his hair made you think he was. And his eyes were very young, indeed. Like . . . well, like Gordon's. Strange, but he seemed a little like Gordon.

"Jack," she said, pronouncing the word carefully like a word said in a lesson in school. "Jack. Yes. I'll remember that."

Mittner scowled. But he was not stupid. He had taken his cue. He must not be angry any more or she would draw away from him, she would turn toward Grant again. That must not happen. So he set himself to be affable, to play the host.

"Let's sit down, Jack," he said, gruffly, but smiling. "Come on."

"All right . . . Jim."

They sat facing Marcia. Each of them was twice as old as Marcia. They had taken money away from men all their lives; they were clever men. But she felt that she was cleverer than they.

So the waiter came in, with another waiter following, and they brought a table and spread a white cloth, and in a moment the table was set and waiting, and there was a plate of consommé steaming upon it, and sending up heart-warming odors. And she ate. She ate like a famished small animal, quickly, with little darts of her hands, with no thought of the men watching, of herself, of anything but the consommeé. Then the salad. The steak that was as big as the platter and an inch thick and brown and juicy and tender. The coffee. Another cup of coffee. Hot, small rolls. And then an ice, very cold, tasting sharply of pineapple.

Then the meal was over. It had been a long meal. For twenty minutes she had scarcely spoken at all. And the men had not bothered her. They had smoked, watching her. They had drunk coffee, their eyes fixed on her. They had smoked some more. They had not looked at each other.

Somewhere outside at a table, a tall blond woman sat wondering what had happened to Jack Grant. And out in the café, the waiters whispered to the head waiter and he said, "It's all right. Mittner is good for the check." And out in the café, Teddy O'Brien told the piano player,

"Mittner's got a tough one to buck up against now. This Jack Grant is smooth. Mighty smooth. I heard a lot about him. You remember the Angelo case? . . ."

But in the room there was no talk, until the meal was all over. Until Marcia Talent remembered all at once how she must look, what they must think. She looked up quickly, her eyes searching—more searching than a child's eyes should ever be. But nothing had happened.

She said, "Thank you. Thank you . . . so much." She said it looking between them, but each took the thanks as his due.

## CHAPTER VIII

MARCIA's brain ticked like a small perfect watch.

A war with men? And here were two men—Jim Mittner and Jack Grant—and she could control them, she could make them do what she wanted them to do. Still, she shouldn't—shouldn't cheat them. Then her brain asked, "Why not? Haven't you got enough nerve to go through with what you've started? You said you were going to get even. Men haven't helped you. You've got to save yourself. Or you'll starve. You'll starve to death or you'll have to go back home. You've got to get what you can out of these men."

She did not listen to another voice that talked about honesty. She was honest and she would always be honest, really, and she wanted to play fair. But she was afraid now. Desperately afraid, because she had been hungry, because to-morrow she might be hungry again. She said to herself: "That excuses you. Of course it does. You can pay them back when you're on your feet again. Of course you can." She meant it. She would pay them back with money. But now she would smile, would make them sorry for her, would do a little play acting. She was a good actress. She had fought her own way all her life except that her manner of fighting was a bit peculiar. First she made conquests and then she put her captives to work for her. That was the easy way.

They had been waiting all this time for her to speak. She studied them. Mittner was perturbed, rather white faced—honestly troubled. Grant—she didn't know. He

seemed worried, anxious. But there was something else about him she could not analyze, could not be sure of. Something that held back. Something a little mysterious. She'd have to change that. She couldn't resist the desire to get back of that mask, to learn the answer. Immediately Grant had become an individual, someone really important. An enemy, in some way. All right.

She said at last, "I couldn't tell you I hadn't any money, Jim. I . . . I don't ask men to help me. I'll make things come right myself."

"But I could have helped . . ."

"I didn't want to admit to you that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was."

"What do you mean?" Grant asked.

"I mean I thought I knew all about Chicago. I saved up a lot of money out of my commissions—I'm a model, you know, and I had a good job. Then I met Nicola Kaspar and he got me to put my money in the shop he was starting and he paid me a good salary and commissions. So I kept my salary and saved some of it and turned my commissions back into the business. I was supposed to be half owner of the shop. And I had some money in the bank and I thought . . ." She fished in her purse and took out some newspaper clippings. "Here. Here's what happened."

"I didn't see that," Mittner said. "I don't read the papers much."

"Neither did I," Grant said. "Let me see those."

They read together, for the moment close in their common interest in Marcia. Then they looked at each other and at her. And in Grant's puzzling eyes there was a new light, now even more puzzling; there was something strange in the way he whistled softly and said finally, "So you've got some dresses and that's all?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do with them? You could pawn them, you know."

"I won't do that. They're too pretty. But I owe the hotel and . . . I haven't any money. I haven't found a job yet and nobody will buy the dresses. But . . . I'll find something to-morrow." She looked up brightly, smiling. She thought, "Make yourself look as though you were smiling to keep up your courage." It was not hard. For she felt that way. But she must play the game. She was fighting now and she had always fought in her own way. So . . . She waited.

"What makes you think you can find something to do?" Grant asked.

That wasn't the right question, she thought. He should have said, "Let me find something for you." She was puzzled more than ever. But he was only a little different. He'd surrender. She was sure.

"I . . ." She was honestly determined, now. "I know I can find something. I'm a model. Really. And I know a lot about dresses."

"You do?"

"Yes. I always trained the models at Kaspar's. We'd get young girls from the country, you know, because they didn't cost as much, and then I'd show them how to wear clothes. Pretty soon they'd quit and get better jobs and begin to make money, too. That was part of my job—finding new models."

"Oh!" Grant studied something in his mind. He was not looking at her at all. He had changed. A few minutes ago he was honestly solicitous, thinking only about her. Now—he was thinking about something else. She had ceased to matter. She must do something or her moment would be over. She must win this move.

"But the hotel worries me."

"How much do you owe?"

"I— A hundred and twenty. They're not very nice about it, either. I don't know what to do." Fear came back into her eyes. And they both saw it. But they reacted differently.

Mittner fumbled inside his coat, brought out his check book, got out his fountain pen, took off the cap, put the book down on the table and started to write a check. Marcia said: "No, Mr. Mittner. I couldn't let you do that."

"Why not? I've got plenty."

"I just can't. I've got to work it out for myself."

"That's right, Miss Talent," Grant cut in. "You wouldn't respect yourself if you didn't make your own way. I wonder——"

"Yes?" She looked more charming that ever now, a small child standing with her feet braced and her head thrown back, telling the world, "I can take care of myself." Looking absurdly young and precious. Mittner was deeply touched. She knew that. But Grant's imperturbable expression did not change.

Then he asked her: "Do you really want to find something you can handle for yourself?"

"Of course."

"Really?"

"She said so once, didn't she?" Mittner demanded belligerently.

"That's so. Listen, Jim. Do you want to gamble on a sporting proposition that might help Miss Talent?"

"That depends on what it is."

"Would you risk one thousand dollars? With a chance to get a profit back for yourself and help her at the same time?"

"That's pretty steep. I want to know something about it," replied Mittner.

"All right. Listen. What Miss Talent just said gives

me an idea. I know a lot of men in town who're in business selling dresses. You know—on Michigan Avenue and on Sheridan Road and on Cottage Grove and all around town."

"Well?"

"Miss Talent, could you run a school for models?"

"A what?" Marcia was suddenly afraid. She had meant for them to help her. But now Grant wanted her to go into business, to be responsible for money. "I don't know what you mean."

"Well, listen. You've got some dresses and you could get some more from the people at the shop and the creditors pretty cheaply, couldn't you?"

"I—I guess so."

"Then suppose we rent a place somewhere near the Loop. I know the place. An empty house on Superior Street. We can get it for a hundred and fifty a month. The whole thing. And we'll use the costumes for the first training lessons. Advertise for girls to learn how to be models. There are always jobs for good models, you say. I'll take care of lining up the dress shops so they'll hire the girls you train. You run the place and I'll get a couple of girls to help you. My secretary knows a couple of girls who might help out. Suppose you come down to my office to-morrow morning and we'll go over the whole thing. Does it sound interesting?"

Her eyes danced.

"Of course. It sounds . . . wonderful. If you . . . if you think I could do it."

"What do you think, Jim?" Grant asked Mittner.

"I don't know. I tell you, Jack, I'd like to know more about it before I . . ."

"Before you took a chance with any money? I suppose so. But just a minute ago you were offering to put up any amount of money Miss Talent wanted."

"That was . . ."

"Different? I don't see any difference."

"He's driving Mittner into a corner," Marcia thought. "Mittner is red in the face now and wishes he hadn't said anything. He's afraid he'll look small before me and Grant knows it; he's taking advantage of that.

"He's almost too clever," her mind said warningly. "Too sure of himself." But it didn't matter. He was only trying to help her. If he could make Mittner help, too . . . But maybe she shouldn't let him risk his money. He might lose it. He might . . . The small chin set firmly. She was at war? All right. She would take what they wanted to give and she'd make what she could out of it. She had to. She was alone and she had to take care of herself.

"If you don't want to . . ." she said to Mittner, letting the words trail away, saying by indirection, "You were just bluffing, then?"

"Of course I do," Mittner blushed valiantly. "If it's going to help you, Marcia. Anything that will help you I want to do. . . . Grant, what are you putting up for the firm?"

Grant took out a check book, wrote a check, signed it with sharp flourishes of the pen, held it up.

"One thousand dollars, my connections, the idea and the start. And a thousand dollars of yours. And the dresses Miss Talent owns and the ones she can get and her knowledge of how to train models. And it's to be her place. That right?"

"I . . . All right. I'll do it."

Mittner wrote his check, and Grant fastened the two together with a twist of one corner and put them in his wallet.

"O.K. What about you, Miss Talent?"

She caught her breath. This was like standing on a

spring board ready to dive into deep water, icy cold. Like drawing back, not being quite ready. Like knowing you might drown, might never come up. Like thinking, "It will be dreadful. It will be glorious."

"I'll try it. If I fail . . ."

"You won't," Mittner said. "I know you won't." If he was committed, he would go all the way. He would make the idea his property. "I'll help you."

"Thank you, Jim. And . . . thank you, Mr. Grant. I can't tell how grateful I am."

"Simply business. No reason for gratitude at all. You get a job and some money to go on and we make some money and a lot of girls learn how to get jobs. . . . It's business for all of us." But his eyes belied what he said. His eyes were soft, now. He seemed somehow less tense, less eager, as though whatever he was working for was accomplished, as though he could forget it. "Now . . ."

There was a discreet knock at the door.

"Yes?" Mittner called.

"A message for Mr. Grant."

Mittner grinned broadly. "That's fine. Come in!"

He winked past Grant, at the waiter, and the waiter smiled slightly. Then he recited loudly, "The blond lady wants to know why you don't come on back to the table, Mr. Grant. She says she wants to go home and for you to come on back." He turned on his heel, vanished. He did not wait for a tip. He was a clever waiter, and he knew the tip his loud voice would earn from Mittner was more than the same loud voice would ever earn him from Jack Grant.

Grant rose without any trace of displeasure.

"Sorry," he said to Marcia. "I forgot about . . . about the lady. I must go. But I'll see you to-morrow morning?"

"Why . . ."

"You oughtn't to do that, Marcia!" Mittner said in a low voice, almost pleading.

"But I don't see why not. I'm going to . . . I'll be there, Mr. Grant. At what time?"

"Eleven o'clock. At the Stockton Building. And we'll have lunch together." His eyes danced and again he looked like a little boy. Marcia felt that same breathless surge for a moment. He was very handsome, at the door, lean and tall and grave and courtly. He was so—so different from Mittner. The Stockton Building where the smiling young man went that day. She might see him. What if she did? He wasn't important.

She said, "That would be nice, Mr. Grant. Good night."

"Mr. Grant?"

"Jack. Good night."

"Good night . . . Marcia . . ."

## CHAPTER IX

GRANT went away and Marcia and Mittner sat alone, and for a moment, while Marcia's eyes still rested on the door, seemed to follow Grant, Mittner stared at her. His expression was a study. There was anger on his face; there was a sort of fright; there was a doglike devotion. For a moment his eyes were almost fine. But then he said: "Well, you sure work fast!"

"What do you mean, Jim?"

"The way you had Jack Grant going. Jack Grant! Why, he's the most notorious——"

"I don't think I want to talk about Jack Grant, Jim," Marcia said sweetly. Too sweetly. "If if wasn't for him and the idea he has . . . Can't you see what it means to me?" Then: "I think we'd better go. Don't you?"

She did not wait for him to answer. She rose and picked up her wrap from the couch and went through the door. She heard Mittner behind her saying something, then paying the waiter, then saying good night to the check girl, to the head waiter, to the guard ("He's the sort who would be proud of being called by his first name in places like this," Marcia thought), then speaking to the doorman.

They got into his car silently and Marcia looked straight ahead. Her head ached still, but not as much. The food had helped. She was not trembling any more. She was not ill. She was only angry; much angrier than she should have been. There was no real reason for

blaming Mittner, for drawing away from him now when his arm touched hers. But she felt that way.

She knew why. She was thinking how different Jack Grant was. She looked for a second at Mittner's jumbled profile and thought of the lean, aquiline line, the cameolike precision of Grant's features. She thought of his white hair. And of his eyes, which were like a boy's. And of his voice, which was kind. And of how strong he was. And of the school—the school for models. Her school. . . .

So they came to the door of her hotel, still in silence.

"I'm going in with you," Mittner said suddenly.

"What for?" Marcia was startled.

"I want to talk to the clerk. That's one thing Grant forgot." He spoke triumphantly, glad of this opening. "He forgot about your money."

"But—" she stopped. After all, why not? Why not let Mittner help? She felt no obligation now. She didn't owe him anything. If he were not so stupid he would see how she felt; he would not force himself and his favors on her. Why not let him help? She could pay him back now. They were—actually they were partners now. So she said: "That would be nice of you, Jim."

The clerk glanced at them incuriously. But his expression changed when Mittner handed over his card. He was suddenly respectful, for the card told what Mittner did and the company he headed was a famous company.

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir. What can I do for you, sir? Good evening, Miss Talent. Good evening! What can I do for you, sir?"

"I just want it understood that you people aren't to bother Miss Talent about her bill," Mittner said bluntly. "I'll—I'll guarantee it. Here—" He scrawled on his card: "This is an acceptance of responsibility for Miss

Marcia Talent's bill at the Tanager Hotel." He signed it, handed the card to the clerk. "That all right?"

"Why—why, of course, Mr. Mittner. But we didn't —we didn't mean to. But——"

Mittner walked away to the elevator. He faced Marcia. He held out one hand over her palm and her fingers closed on something crisp, folded—a bill.

"No; I can't take this. I——"

"Never mind. You take it and don't worry. Here's your elevator. You know something, Marcia?"

"What?"

"I love you."

He was a funny little fat man and he did not mean anything in the world to her, but Marcia might have seen pathos and tragedy and something rather beautiful in his eyes at that moment. But she did not. She was seeing Jack Grant's face in her mind, and nothing else mattered. Except the school. The school Jack Grant was starting. . . . And Mittner was only a funny little fat man.

The elevator door opened and she stepped in.

"Good night, Jim," she said lightly. She turned away, looking at the ornamented walls of the elevator. Thinking about to-morrow; about the school; about Grant. Still holding the crumpled bill in her hand, safe now because Mittner had helped. But she did not even hear him say, "Good night," and she never knew there were tears of tenderness in the little fat man's eyes.

It took Marcia an hour and forty minutes to dress the next morning. Only after she had put on one dress, changed, changed again, fixed her hair three times, worked with her lips and her eyes and her cheeks for ever so long, was she ready to face the world. But this morning the elevator boy burbled, "Good morning" and

the clerk was polite and went out to open the door for her. And the taxi starter said, "Cab, Miss Talent?" Word goes about quickly in a hotel on the gold coast. Already all those people knew she had money. But had she? She opened her purse, unfolded the bill Mittner had given her. A hundred dollars! But she . . . She fixed her soft lips firmly. Why not? She could pay him back in a few days. Perhaps out of the profits from the school. That might happen. And the money meant meals and something on the hotel bill and taxis and everything. She needed it. She couldn't afford to go hungry and worried. Her looks wouldn't stand it. She had to be . . . careful.

"Downtown," she told the driver. She beamed at the starter. She held up the hundred dollar bill and his eyes glistened. "All I have," she said grandly. "I'll leave something for you to-night."

"Oh, don't mention it. Thank you, Miss Talent."

The cab pulled away and into the stream of Lake Shore Drive traffic and she looked at the lake happily, pleased with the blue and the white and the green—almost as though all this were a stage setting arranged for her benefit. She sat nestled back in a corner of the cab and when a red light halted the cab a youngster in a low roadster stared at her, as from a distance, unable to take his eyes away. So she smiled. A smile did not mean anything. It might make him happy. It did. He smiled like a schoolboy and jammed down his accelerator and sped away, lost in traffic, hurrying from her. She laughed a little. Men were funny. So easy to do things to them. Just look at them and say things the right way and be sweet and they'd do anything in the world for you. Like Mittner. Like . . . Jack Grant? But Grant had been odd. He was kind and his voice got deep when he talked to her, but somehow he held back; there was some part of

him that was not in subjection. He was planning all the time he talked. Thinking ahead. Odd . . . Well, she could change that. She would change it too! Not that he meant anything. Too odd. . . . Funny. She hadn't thought about that before. But she didn't know any young boys any more. None of the boys she used to know at the Plankinton ever called her on the phone. They were . . . well, afraid. Of course. She knew too much for young boys like them. They didn't have any money to spend, either. A chocolate soda and a movie and a bus ride, or something like that. And if they did take you out and spend money on you it was plain that they were counting up the cost, thinking, "I'll have enough for breakfast," or "if the taxi is more than a dollar I'll have to walk home." No fun to go out with a boy knowing he was feeling that way. Only . . . well, young boys, boys her own age, were nice; they made you feel they were your age and you could be natural with them if you wanted to, and . . .

"Here we are, miss."

"Thank you. . . . Oh, driver. This one hundred dollar bill is all I have. Will you get it changed?"

"Sure thing, miss. You want to wait here in the cab?"

"Yes. Hurry, please. I'm . . . late."

"Right away."

He ducked into a cigar store in the building, came scuttling out, disappeared into the shirt store on the corner.

Marcia looked at the floor, at the meter, at nothing. And then she felt suddenly odd, a little cold. She did nothing at first. But something was drawing her. She looked up quickly, startled. She sank back into the seat, back into the shadow. A man was watching her. A man of ordinary height with nothing unusual about his

face. Only his lips were very thin and his eyes . . . It was his eyes that made her cold. They were like hot glass. They were burning and like an animal's eyes and they turned her cold. They terrified her. Unconsciously, she flung her hand up across her mouth, she cowered, like a frightened kitten. And the man stepped forward, stood with his harsh face framed in the open window, stared at her, said nothing, only stared. His eyes seemed to move at her, to grow larger, larger . . .

Then he put his hand in through the window and his fingers fell on her arm and closed like steel clamps, pressing into her soft flesh, drawing her toward him. His other hand caught her purse, jerked it away from her. And his eyes leered and he opened his thin lips. He said, "Well, say something. Say something, baby!"

She screamed. And the moment after she screamed the man in the window plunged backward, seemed to turn a cartwheel, sprawled face down on the sidewalk, was up snarling something that she could not understand, went down again, came up with something flashing in the air. And dropped flat, silent.

There had been people passing, hurrying to offices, to jobs, to breakfast, a moment before. Now there was a compact ring of faces around her, white blobs, and she could barely see them. The mob thronged around the cab, around the man who lay on the sidewalk, moving a little now. Around another man who stood over him. The man who had helped her that other time on the bus! The young man who helped her and then had disappeared!

The man on the sidewalk shot out one hand suddenly, like a snake striking. The man over him raised his foot, brought his heel down hard on the hand. The man on the sidewalk screamed.

"Get up," the man over him said quietly. His voice was soft and almost apologetic, but it rose over the voices of the mob; it brought Marcia out of her stupor; it fixed her eyes on him. He was rather tall. He wore a light gray suit, no hat. His hair was brown and a little wavy, his hands were large, closed now in formidable fists. He had a straight undistinguished profile until suddenly he smiled down at the man who lay on the sidewalk, and he said again, "Get up."

A policeman forced his way through the crowd now, panting, his eyes darting from one man to the other.

The man got up slowly, one arm hanging loosely. Then suddenly he threw himself at the tall young man, sputtering curses, his hands flailing out. And the tall man stepped to one side, and his right hand doubled in a fist, caught the man under the chin. The man went down again. This time he did not move.

"What about it, miss?" the officer demanded. "What's going on here?"

A confused clamor of voices rose. And the tall man grinned, stepped back and said, "He bothered the lady, officer. So I yanked him away. Then he pulled a gun and I had to hurt him. I—" He regarded his bleeding knuckles ruefully. "Maybe I was too rough."

"What about it, miss?" the officer called through the taxi window.

"He—that's right. That man——"

"Know him?"

"I never saw him before."

"What'd he do?"

"I felt him looking at me and then he came to the taxi and put his hand in and grabbed my purse and I—" She slumped back in the seat.

"Better get her out of there," the officer said to the tall man. "You know the lady?"

"I—surely. Yes. Miss—Miss Jones, let's step inside the building. Away from the crowd."

She stared at him. He did have a nice smile. He wasn't at all excited. He looked cool and capable. And young. He wasn't any older than she was.

"Yes," she said. "Yes—Mr. Brown."

He opened the door.

"Lady. Oh, lady!" The taxi driver, one hand gripping a sheaf of bills, pressed his way through the circle, held out the money, stared at the officer dragging the blue-eyed man to his feet, gulped, said, "What—what——"

"You explain to the officer, driver," the tall young man said, taking the bills from the driver. "Here." He handed the man a dollar bill. And deftly, so easily that Marcia could not quite believe it, he pushed one man one way, another to the other side, and in a second they were through the crowd, into the lobby of the building, getting into an elevator.

"Let's go," the young man told the elevator operator curtly.

"Yes, sir."

They went up to the ninth floor. They got out and Marcia followed the young man down the hall, too puzzled to protest.

## CHAPTER X

THE young man seemed to have forgotten about her. His bruised hand was jammed deep in his pocket. He brought out a key, unlocked a door—nothing was printed on the door, Marcia saw; she wondered more than ever—ushered her into a one-room office. Marcia saw a bare desk and two chairs and a big filing case and a long bookcase filled with books with bright covers. There was a deep-piled rug on the floor. That was all. But the windows opened on Michigan Avenue and she could see the lake.

She dropped into a chair, suddenly nerveless, the stupor of a moment before come back. Her eyes closed.

She felt cool hands on her forehead. Then she tasted water, very cold. She fought her way through a haze, opened her eyes and saw the young man bending over her, his face solicitous but not excited, his eyes smiling a little.

"Better now?"

"I—yes. I'm all right. I— Oh, thank you!"

"Quite all right? Really? I think I ought to thank that crook. I've been wanting to—to meet you—I mean, I—" He stammered, blushed, stopped dead, turned away quickly and made a pretense of looking out of the window.

Marcia giggled. Fright was gone. With a man being nice to her—a man who was grateful to another man for the chance to knock him down so the man could meet her—she was not afraid at all. And he had a nice

voice. There was a faint drawl in it. Not southern, she decided, nor eastern. And he seemed oddly polite. A little stiff, as though he did not quite know how to talk to her. But eager to calm her, to reassure her.

"Just a bad actor, that fellow," he said brusquely, not turning to face her. The back of his neck was still red. Marcia stifled another giggle. Mustn't hurt his feelings. And he was nice. She remembered him on the street and his helping her on the bus and then walking away. And now helping her again, with his hands, with his quickness. Nice! He went on: "Lots of that kind of chaps hanging around Chicago, I guess. You—you better put away that change." He faced around, and looking at him she realized that he was not really homely at all, he only seemed—thin faced, desiccated by the wind, hardened somehow. "I'm sorry I got a crowd around you like that, but I sort of had to. Kind of a bad man, really. Like—like a fellow I had a little trouble with back home."

"Back home?"

"Out where I come from—Montana. Ever hear about Montana?"

"Of course. I'm from Oregon myself."

"You're not! Not really?"

"Indeed, I am." She smiled at him and again he blushed. Funny how looking at her bothered him. And she noticed his eyes. He looked as if—well, as if he'd like to kiss her right now. But he wouldn't. He had his feet set hard and he was making sure that he didn't move toward her. She felt a hot thrill of power over this young man. She loved it.

"Where are you from, Miss——?"

"Big Bend." She laughed, "But you never heard of that place."

"Bet you I have. Saw it on a map once. And I

reckon I've been through there once or twice. I used to drive out to the coast a lot." He laughed. He had a pleasant laugh. Unsure and short, as though he really wanted to laugh loudly, but thought he shouldn't. "I'm from a big place, too . . . Big Timber. Ever hear of that?"

"Surely, I was . . . I was there once with my folks when I was little. My father was a stock buyer."

"Sure 'nough? Say, that's funny. Isn't it, now? My dad . . . he's got a ranch out there. I bet your dad bought some cattle from my dad sometime. I bet he did. What do you know about that?"

"I think it's . . . Isn't the world small? I know that's an old line. But isn't it true?"

"Sure is. And I'm mighty glad, too. I'm mighty glad. . . . You know . . . I wonder would you care if I said something?"

"Of course, not. Only . . ."

"Oh, it isn't much. Not to interest you. I just . . . I've remembered you from the first time I saw you. And that day on the bus . . . You know how hard it was to just stand there and look at you."

"Why?" she asked with a wicked appearance of innocence, wide-eyed.

"Because . . . because. . . ." He stammered again. "Well, because you are just the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life."

"Lots of girls in Chicago are prettier than I am. You just haven't noticed them, that's all."

"And I won't be noticing them . . . not after seeing you. I tell you . . ."

"That's silly," she said. But she liked it. He said simple things with such dogged earnestness that they sounded almost new. She liked the way his face got almost homely, lean and solemn, when he wasn't smiling.

And the way even his eyes were gay when a smile transformed his face. And . . .

"But I haven't thanked you. You couldn't guess how frightened I was. And that man . . . why, he might have killed you."

"I don't hardly think so. I . . . used to box a little bit with the boys around school. And . . . Well, that kind of man isn't really tough. Just . . . just kind of mean, that's all."

"Easy for you to say. But it might have been . . . terrible. If you hadn't been there. How did you happen to . . . I mean, how did you notice? Nobody else seemed to notice until after . . . after it was all over."

He blushed again.

"I hate to tell you."

"Why?" she persisted.

"Well . . . You know, since I saw you the other day I've been standing out in front of the building for hours every morning just hoping you'd walk past."

"Why?" she asked again, reveling in his confession.

"Why . . . just so I could look at you."

"You shouldn't talk like that. I don't even know you. And you can't tell . . . I might be one of these girl bandits they're always printing stories about."

"Not you." He said it with all the earnestness of a boy pleading with his teacher. "But . . . say, I sure ought to tell you my name. Of course. My name's Kerrigan. Jerry Kerrigan. I'm here in Chicago running an office for my father. We've got a dude ranch now, you see. And a lot of Chicago people come out there, so my dad had me open an office here to sort of take care of things and get people started out right and . . . Say, I'm doing an awful lot of talking about myself. And I don't even know your name yet."

"Marcia Talent."

"That's a pretty name. I like Marcia. One of my mother's cousins was named Marcia. Marcia Delaney. Nice name, too. But . . . I like Marcia Talent better."

"Thank you, Mr. Kerrigan."

"I wish . . ."

She smiled like a pleased small child.

"I mean . . . thank you, Jerry. Thank you so much. I don't know any Chicago man who would do a thing like that. Or who would know what to do. I . . . I'm glad to know somebody from back home."

"Next door neighbors, almost."

"Yes. But I . . ." She looked at her watch.

"I'm keeping you, Miss Talent. I . . . I forgot. You've got to go right away?"

"Yes. I have an appointment here in the building."

"Oh." He looked so disappointed, so crushed, that almost she said, "But I'll come back." Then she remembered what she had forgotten for quite a while. He was a man. He was her natural enemy. She had begun a war on men and she would carry it through and he could not possibly be of any help to her, so why should she encourage him? She stiffened, put on a new rôle. The soft smile was gone from her face. "I'll have to hurry," she said.

"Can't I . . . walk to the elevator with you?"

"If you want to," she said carelessly.

Like a small queen she went out of the office, Jerry Kerrigan following, towering over her, his face almost homely now, his eyes fixed on her, his hands swinging loosely at his sides, the bruised knuckles forgotten. Then he stopped a moment, stood staring at her. Then he said, "I . . . I know this is being fresh, Miss Talent. But I . . . you see, I'm a stranger in Chicago and I don't know anybody and I don't know much about Chicago ways. But I . . ."

"You want to see me again?"

"Yes. I'd like to. I'd like it a lot."

"I don't know. I'm pretty busy."

His face fell. Now his eyes accused her. His eyes said, "You were kind a moment ago. What made you change?" She felt a little shamed.

"Of course you can see me sometime," she said then. "Call me on the phone."

"I sure will. That's . . . mighty nice of you. I bet you think I'm being fresh to ask you anything like that."

"Not at all." She dismissed the subject casually. "It wasn't exactly being fresh to knock that man down when he tried to rob me, was it? So I . . ." The elevator light flashed.

"Here," she said quickly. Call me. . . ."

"To-night?"

She did not answer. The car was going up. And the last thing she saw was Jerry Kerrigan holding her card, looking at it, looking at the elevator. Looking—she thought—very soft and very western, but not so very clever. Still, he had been nice to her. And it would be a good story to tell Jack Grant. He'd never believe a thing like that could have happened right in front of his building. But . . . things always happened in Chicago. Then she thought of something else. She had thought this man was different, that day on the bus; she had liked him for it. But to-day . . . Of course he had helped her. And he did it well. But then he wanted to phone her. He wanted to take her some place. He wanted . . . he wanted to be paid for what he had done. So? Another man. Another man like the rest of them. Like all the rest of them but Jack Grant. . . .

She came to his office thinking that. His name was on

the door. "John M. Grant, Broker." Nothing more. And she entered a small anteroom where a small girl sat behind a big desk, typing busily on a set of cards.

"I want to see Mr. Grant," Marcia said curtly.

"Can't. He's in conference." The girl did not even look up.

Marcia's eyes flashed in a way that would have startled Jerry Kerrigan into protesting disbelief.

"I told you . . . I want to see Mr. Grant. And you get him. Right now." She threw the words at the girl like small, sharp pebbles.

"I . . . Say, who do you think you are, anyhow? I told you . . ."

"You told her what, Miss Perry?"

Jack Grant had come out of his office and he stood looking down at the girl, his face hard, his voice cold and flat.

"You told her what?"

"I . . . I didn't mean anything, Mr. Grant. Really I didn't. I . . . I'm so sorry, miss. I didn't know . . ."

"You don't know much of anything," Jack Grant said. Somehow, Marcia felt, the words hurt so much more than they should; he said things as though he were slapping the girl's face. "See if you can't learn a little bit before you insult anyone else. . . . Come in, Miss Talent."

## CHAPTER XI

GRANT'S office was like a setting for a movie. His desk was of carved wood, very wide, the top covered with thick plate glass. The penholder was of onyx; Marcia could tell it had cost a lot of money. The chairs were upholstered in bright green leather. There were long, heavy drapes at the windows. The carpet was thick, oriental, silky. The room was quiet, far away from the street noises, somehow somber, terribly impressive.

"Sit down, Marcia. How do you feel after last night's excitement?"

"Very well. I just had some more excitement, though."

"What?"

She told him the story. Watching his smooth, chiseled features, staring at his silvery hair, at his eyes, she thought, "Jerry Kerrigan! A big, homely boy from the wide-open spaces. That's all." She thought, "He'd look pretty poor alongside Jack Grant. And Jack Grant is different from all of them. All of them!" She thought, "There's something in Jack Grant that he holds back. Something mysterious. He's hard. But I'll make him forget that. When I want him to. When I want him to be nice to me he will be." She was sure of all this. But she could not control the situation as she was used to controlling similar situations.

She told the story and she made Jerry Kerrigan sound rough and fumbling like a Newfoundland puppy. She made the whole thing sound inconsequential, rather

funny; she made herself by her reticence a heroine who could have driven the man away without help if she had been let alone. But Jack Grant did not change. He was kind, interested, even intent. He was polite. But he was still Jack Grant. He continued to be a self-contained person and she realized that she was not touching him at all. This was the first man she had ever known who did not unbend at least a little under her charm, and she was angry. What made him think he was so much better than anyone else? What made him think he had to act that way? She wasn't going to take advantage of him; she didn't want anything from him; she was through with men; they were just business partners, but he didn't have to try to make her feel so small; he didn't have to push her away with his voice and the cool politeness of his eyes.

Then she felt a sort of grudging admiration. This man was strong. He was stronger than Gordon Wales or Mittner, or any of them. She thought suddenly, "I wonder if I'm going to fall in love with Jack Grant. But I couldn't. That would be silly. Only—" She'd better not think about it any more.

But all through the next two hours she used every small, clever trick she knew to subdue Grant, to force into his eyes the look of adoration, of servile worship, that she expected from all men. And she did not succeed. Jack Grant did not change at all.

Sitting in the big restaurant watching Grant Marcia said, in her smallest voice, "But, really—I'm scared by the idea of trying to run a school, Mr. Grant. I don't know enough."

"You think you haven't changed any yourself since you came to town?"

"No. I haven't."

"Yes, you have. You've changed a lot. I can see it.

You're not sure of yourself yet. But you fool a lot of people."

"Mr. Grant——"

"You don't like me to talk to you that way? Sorry. It's true, just the same. You know— See here, Marcia. We might as well get this straight to start with. I'm not going to put in my time like Mittner, telling you how good you are. You're rather cute and you've got some stuff, and I guess I like you, all right. But that's all. Get me?"

She stared. He didn't have to talk to her like that. Men didn't talk to her that way. It just wasn't being done. She didn't like it. She— He could be kind. As he was last night. She ought to get angry.

"Mr. Grant," she began, "I don't have to listen to you when you talk like that." She started to get up from the table. "I—" She paused, waited for him to take his cue. But, instead, he laughed at her. He laughed politely enough, without showing his square white teeth. But he was laughing at her.

"Of course you don't have to listen to me," he said quietly. "You can beat it right now if you want to, and I'll get somebody else. You can square it with Mittner.

"Listen to me, and don't be a giddy fool about it. I think we can all three make some money out of this stunt. But it's business. That's all. Now, if you don't want to go on with it, that's all right with me."

She wasn't sure what to do. And the woman at the next table watched her inquisitively, whispered something to the man she was with. Both of them stared. Marcia couldn't bear having people stare at her unless they were admiring her. She sat down.

Now she became the picture of the very small child, fluffy and hurt and soft and sad. She thought Grant weakened a little. His eyes were not so cold. His thin

lips did not press together quite so tightly. She felt something else. She felt that she had to conquer this man if she never did another thing in the world, to prove to herself that she could, to justify her belief that any man was putty for her small hands. She had to do it. And— She felt a greater interest in him than she had felt in any other man in a long time. Maybe because he kept her at arm's length, spoke to her sharply. Maybe because she couldn't conquer him. He— She'd better not get to thinking about that. Frightened, she scurried away from the danger of thinking too honestly about herself.

"I guess it's all right, Mr. Grant. I— Well, will you just go ahead and tell me about it, please? I'll listen."

"Of course. Waiter—some more iced coffee. Now, listen, Marcia. I've already got the place for us. I want you to go up there and look it over. And I've put in ads in all the papers, advertising that you will train models and find jobs for them and announcing that enrollment opens Monday—three days from now. You could do the work right now, but you better put in some time getting a course laid out. Want to make it look good, you know. The harder the girls think it is to get into the school the more they'll want to enroll."

"I think—Mr. Grant, you know a lot about people, don't you?"

"I wish you'd stop that."

"What?"

"Talking to me that way. It's an act and you know it. You and I aren't going to get along at all if you can't be on the level. Say what you really think. I do."

"I know. That's what I really think. You'll make the school go over, won't you?"

"No. You will. You and the other girls."

"What other girls?"

"I'm putting two girls in to help you. One of them I ran across at a costumer's. She's got money—in society and so on. She thinks she's quite a beauty and she really knows something about decorating. And so she's going to work with us. Under a fake name. The other one is a designer. She hasn't got any brains but she's clever on her job. And the three of you all have your names on the stationery. You're the owners."

"How about you and Mr. Mittner?"

"Our names don't appear at all. And if anybody asks about it you tell them it's your own idea and your own money. Remember that. I haven't got anything to do with it at all."

"Why not?"

"That's my affair. I told you a minute ago——"

"Of course," she said helplessly. "Whatever you say, Mr. Grant."

"That's it. And don't forget about that name stuff. You girls are the whole business. I just keep the books and look on and see if we can make some money."

"Oh!" She thought quickly. Her small brain went around and around the situation, darting at it and darting back. Her eyes were not smiling any more. The hard practical coldness that was always Marcia's salvation was in force now.

"What do we get out of it?" she asked finally. If he wanted her to be hard, she could. Maybe he'd like her better that way.

"Salary to start. Drawing account for all three of you. Fifty a week to you and thirty-five apiece to the others. Until we really get going."

"Oh," she said again. Not so much, after seventy-five at the shop. But fifty would help. She could take care of her rent all right. And there would be commissions coming in later, Mr. Grant assured her.

"When do we start?"

"I'll get the other girls down this afternoon and talk to them. Then I'll get you all together to-morrow. How much would you say we ought to charge girls for being in the school?"

"A hundred dollars." That was the easiest figure to think of.

"No. Make it a hundred and eighteen fifty. That's for ten lessons. It's always better to make the figure uneven. So we'll figure it that way."

"But I wonder—" This was going fast and she did not like to go fast. She wanted things arranged slowly and carefully so that everything fitted together, so that everything came out even. She had always lived that way and all the men she had ever known had seen to it that things were arranged for her. She realized suddenly that after all she hadn't had much to do with business in Chicago. There had always been a job open for her. Salaries had been fixed for her and all she had to say was "yes" or "well, I'm not so sure." But now she must take chances, she must decide things for herself, she must take the responsibility for a school, for a lot of girls, for getting dresses and planning how to teach them and getting jobs for them. She did not want to take risks. All her instincts—all the experience of her life—warned her against anything that was not definite.

"You wonder how you'll get along until we get going? Here."

He handed her a bill, across the table, openly, and the woman at the next table leered. Marcia flushed. He didn't have to do things that way. He wasn't talking to his stenographer now. If he'd only act like—well, like Jerry Kerrigan. Respectful and awed and quietly courteous like Jerry. He looked nice, and he could be nice.

He had been kind last night, kind and thoughtful. Until she mentioned the dresses. Funny how that changed him. Funny how he looked now. Like a man who didn't really want to be with her, who didn't see that she was pretty and wouldn't have cared anyhow.

She thought insistently, "But he'll change. I'll make him change." She thought—but she did not say it even to herself, she never said things like that openly in her mind, she only thought them subconsciously, a little ashamed—"I can change him by being the way I can be with men." She thought, "This is really where I start fighting." So with the arrogance that was born in her —the arrogance that grew as she went on getting away with whatever she wanted—she said finally, "All right. We'll do it. Thank you, Mr. Grant. I'll like working for you." But she was thinking, "All right. We'll fight it out. And I'll bet I beat you." They shook hands across the table. Then he said, "Well, I've got a date. What's your telephone number?"

"Plaza 0401."

"I'll call you at five. Be sure to be there."

"Of course."

"Waiter. Give me the check."

He tipped the waiter just a quarter. He wasn't like Mittner; he didn't spend money just for the feeling of spending it. She rather liked that. The waiter was respectful to Grant anyhow, but Mittner's money never made waiters respect him. She liked walking out of the dining room with Grant. She knew people were watching.

Grant said, "Well, good-by. I'll call you." He went away smiling. Things were going very well.

And Marcia went home. She inspected the bill he had given her. Fifty dollars. She already had almost a

hundred. She paid the hotel clerk seventy-five dollars and went to her room. Jack would call up at five and say, "Let's have dinner." She wanted to look her best, of course. She spent most of the afternoon making herself beautiful.

## CHAPTER XII

MARCIA looked at the clock. It was five o'clock now. Jack would call pretty soon. She'd be very business-like. Just say, "Yes. Let's talk it over at your office when the thing is ready to start." She wouldn't accept the dinner invitation at first. Not until he'd asked her twice. Then she'd say very slowly, "Well, all right. I guess I can." Something like that. Men had to be treated that way. You couldn't let them know you had waited for them to telephone. That made them feel too important. And then they thought they could tell you what to do or they got bossy or they tried to say you couldn't see anybody else. Of course she wouldn't let Jack Grant say that. She'd see Mittner just because he wanted her to see him and she ought to be nice to him. And Jerry. Nice boy, really. Not good looking. Really, if you stopped to think about it, homely. His ears were too big and he didn't do much to his hair, he just sort of pushed it back off his forehead and forgot about it. And his collars weren't starched. Went to some small western college, probably, and thought a lot more about riding around out in the country than being in the city. Missing Chicago altogether. Not ever being a part of it and not even wanting to be, very much. Just here for a little while because a lot of society people liked to think they were tough and liked to go out on a ranch and let the cowboys laugh at them. But he had helped out. She had been really frightened for a minute. And he knew just what to do. But then he blushed. Jack Grant

wouldn't blush or be worried if you were nice to him. he didn't even——

The telephone rang sharply. She started to run across the room. She stopped herself. That was no way to act. She walked slowly, stood there, let the telephone ring twice more, forced into her voice a note of languor, of disinterest, as she answered, "Hello."

"Miss Talent? Marcia?"

It wasn't Grant. It was—the voice was familiar. But she wasn't sure.

"Yes. This is Miss Talent."

"Marcia?"

"Yes. Yes. This is Marcia. What do you want?"

"This is Jerry. Jerry Kerrigan."

"Who?" She knew very well. But she was angry. What business had he calling up, anyhow? But she had given him the number. But why did he call up when she was waiting for Grant to call? He wouldn't know, of course. He wouldn't understand about anything like that. She might as well be nice and get rid of him.

"Jerry. You remember me, don't you?"

"Of course, Lochinvar from the West." She had heard that somewhere and it seemed to fit all right, so she said it.

"That's right." He laughed awkwardly, self-consciously. "I wondered if you were all right?"

"What about?"

"Well, this morning. I mean you looked so pale and I thought—well, I wondered if you—if you——"

"You forget that this is Chicago," she said lightly, like a mother to a stupid child. "Things happen here all the time. I'd forgotten all about it."

"Oh." Disappointment came over the wire.

"I mean—except that you were so nice to me. I wouldn't forget that."

"Oh!" Now his voice was elated. "That's good. I —I wanted to ask you if you—I mean——"

It was nice to have a man's voice sound like that. After the way Jack Grant had talked, it sounded good when a man stammered and couldn't tell you what he wanted. She felt kinder now. Jerry Kerrigan didn't know it but he was good for her to know. He helped in a way he wouldn't ever realize.

"You wanted to ask me—" She prompted softly.

"Well, I got some tickets for a show and I thought maybe—maybe you'd let me take you somewhere to dinner and to the show afterwards. I— Well, I wouldn't know exactly where to go, but I thought maybe you'd tell me. You know so much about Chicago and——"

"That's very nice of you, Jerry," she cut in. "But I'm already engaged."

"Oh!" Greater disappointment than before was in his voice now. "You couldn't make it, then?"

"No. I have a very important business call and after that I'll probably be busy all evening."

"But you're not sure?"

"I— Well—" She had learned caution a long time ago. Never make a refusal to a man final. That was a cardinal rule for Marcia. "No. Not quite sure how long I'll be busy."

"Then I'll call back," he said eagerly. "I'll call at seven o'clock."

"But——"

"Good-by. I'll call you at seven."

He was gone and she couldn't tell him, "Don't bother me. Don't be calling up when I'm not interested." But

it didn't matter. She'd be out and she'd tell the clerk, "If Mr. Kerrigan calls I won't be in to-night or to-morrow night, either." That would be simpler, anyhow. She never liked to have to hurt people too much. She'd rather have somebody else do it for her. So that would work well.

She waited. She waited five minutes, and ten minutes. Then the telephone rang.

"Yes?"

"This is the clerk speaking, Miss Talent."

"Oh— Well, what is it?"

"We've got a special delivery down here for you. I'll send it up."

"All right."

Who could be writing her a special delivery letter? Not the folks at home. Unless— Her mother might be sick. No. Mother was well. It couldn't be that. Then——

She answered the sharp knock at the door, handed the boy a quarter, slammed the door, inspected the envelope. It said "John D. Grant, Broker" in one corner in small black letters. She ripped open the envelope. There was a single sheet of paper. The message was typewritten!

> "Marcia: I found I'd be too busy to telephone. I've started arrangements and I want you to meet Hélène Goodman and Doris Dean—that's the society girl's incognito—at my office to-morrow at two o'clock."

That was all. It was signed in pencil "Jack." That was all there was to it. He wouldn't even take time to telephone. He probably dictated it to that girl on his way out of the office. To see the blond woman he had been with last night, maybe. To take her to dinner.

Marcia thought for a moment that she was going to

cry. But she caught herself. Cry about Jack Grant? Cry about any man? No. Marcia Talent didn't do things like that. Not Marcia Talent.

She was crying, anyhow. There wasn't any use trying to stop the tears. She was crying because a man didn't bother to call her up. She dropped on her bed, face down, and for a few minutes Marcia Talent, who was so very sure that she was not like any other girl in the world, was like every other girl who ever lived.

Until the telephone rang again.

She whirled, jumped up. It might be Jack Grant after all. Maybe he'd changed his mind. Maybe he was calling to say, "Let me see you a little while." Maybe——

"Hello. Hello." You never could have told, hearing Marcia's voice over the telephone, that she had been crying a moment ago.

"Hello. Marcia?"

It was Jerry Kerrigan. She half raised her hand to drop the receiver on the hook. Then she stopped.

Jack Grant didn't think he needed to bother to be nice to her? All right. Jerry Kerrigan wanted to be nice to her. He'd spend the whole evening doing things for her and being respectful and awed and all the rest of it.

"Yes, Jerry. I'm so glad you called back. I'm not going to be busy after all. So——"

"So I can see you?" He shouted it. He sounded like a little boy being happy. He really meant it, too.

"Yes, Jerry."

"I'm awfully glad."

"So am I."

Jerry looked perfectly all right in his dinner coat, but not distinguished. Still, she could see that his clothes were good; his hair had been combed more carefully now, but an unruly sort of cowlick was out of place. His

hat was expensive but he wore it as though he did not think much of it. He still wore the square wrist watch with the capable thick leather band, almost like a wrestler's band, on his right wrist. She much preferred gold bands, or even bracelets. He looked very tanned, against the white of his shirt front. But girls sitting in the lobby were staring. He was so big. People couldn't help looking at him. And when he smiled, seeing her come out of the elevator, he was again handsome and she felt a proud proprietary thrill. She said "Jerry!" softly, in a small voice, and she could tell that he loved the way she said it.

"Where shall we go?" he asked her, when they were outside the door.

"Wherever you'd like, Jerry."

"But I don't know anything about Chicago, you see. It's all pretty new to me. I stick pretty close to the hotel. I've only been here a week, you see."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"I don't know, Marcia. I thought I wanted to go home in a hurry. This town is too noisy for me. And too dirty. But now I don't know how long I'll stay."

"You mean because of me?"

"You know, don't you?"

His eyes were grave and searching. She turned her head away. It was never good to let a serious man look into your eyes too long. You might believe him. And even if she believed Jerry Kerrigan—what then?

"I'll guide you," she said brightly. "Do you want to get cocktails first?"

"I— Why, I'll tell you, Marcia, I'm not very crazy about cocktails. But if you do, you just say where."

"No," she said. "No, I don't care for them at all. But—you know, most of the men you meet in Chicago——"

"I know. I guess maybe they're pretty hard for you to have to associate with, aren't they?"

"Yes." She put one small hand into the hard curve of his arm. He was strong. Stronger than Jack Grant, probably. But— Never mind about Jack. If he didn't want to bother— "Let's go," she told him. They got into a taxicab. He handed a quarter to the starter. "That right?" he asked. "I'm not quite sure about how much I ought to give these fellows, you know. Out home we don't do much of that." She assured him "That was plenty" and in the same breath she said to the driver, "Golden Tower."

It was a short drive. And as they rode she looked straight ahead, but she could feel his eyes on her. She knew that as she told him, "That's where a Chicago man has a roof bungalow that cost $300,000," and as she said, "That's the Oak Street beach," and as she said, "That's the Drake," he was not seeing the things she spoke of, he was seeing the expression on her small face, he was watching her profile and he was watching her lips. It was nice to be watched adoringly like that by somebody of your own age. She felt all at once that she wasn't so sorry to be going out with Jerry. He'd be nice to her."

## CHAPTER XIII

"Do you dance?" Marcia asked Jerry.

"Some. You see, we dance a lot out home. But I don't suppose I know the Chicago steps. Maybe you'd teach me?"

"I'll try. Where'd you go to school, Jerry?"

"Gonzaga. Ever hear of it? It's quite a school, out west. Have good football teams there, too."

"Of course, I've heard of Gonzaga. I knew a boy from there. Myles— Myles Herbert, I think it was."

"I don't guess I ever knew him. But it's a good school."

"Yes."

They talked about Gonzaga. They talked a little about the West. But she did not want to hear about the West; days in the West were all over for her; she wasn't ever going back. And he did not want to talk about Montana and the ranch and the funny people from the East now; he wanted her to tell him about Chicago; he wanted to know what she liked, for, if he could, he would give her everything in the world that she liked.

He helped her out of the taxi carefully, as though she were precious and might break. He stepped back to hold the door of the café open. She thought, "Not many of the boys I know in Chicago are like that. He's —old-fashioned, I guess." But she liked it; she shared with all other women a liking for being made to feel important. And she realized that Jerry Kerrigan was a perfect foil, that his angular height, his strongly chiseled

features, his mop of dark hair, made her small blond figure more attractive, smaller.

He chose a table near the wall, almost in the shadow. "I feel kind of funny sitting out there," he said. "People look at you so much in Chicago. Especially when—well, when you're with a pretty girl."

"But I'm not."

"You're the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life," he said, warmly. "I never thought I'd see anybody like you outside of books."

"You read a lot?"

"Yes. I—well, I was going to be a writer. I went to Europe with my father and mother a while ago, and I got interested in—" He stopped. But he plunged on because her eyes ordered him to go on. "I got interested in pictures and I'd like to write about them. Funny, isn't it—for a cowboy from 'way out in Montana?"

"But you're not a cowboy. Not, really. You're not a bit like a movie cowboy, anyhow."

He laughed.

"But when they come out to the dude ranch I am," he said. "I put on boots and chaps and a red shirt and a five-gallon hat. You ought to see me! And I talk like Gary Cooper, or somebody. Have to, you know. That's the act. They like it."

Marcia let him go on talking. She did not say very much, for it did not seem necessary. He was starved for someone to listen to him. She got the story in pieces. His family obviously had money; they were not small ranchers at all. He had been given everything he wanted. He had books and a car and all the clothes he wanted and a big allowance. Now he was working on a salary, paid by his father, because he wanted it to be that way. He was getting acquainted with people who would be visitors at the dude ranch, and they asked him out sometimes,

but he had no one he could really talk with. He was lonely. Would she let him see her? Quite a lot? Just as much as she could. Just—all the time.

"You're nice to talk that way," she said, with the air of a woman of the world admonishing a boy from somewhere. "But, of course, I can't. I've got my business, you know."

"You're in business? I can't imagine that, Marcia."

"Why not? I'm a lot smarter than you think. And I'm starting a new school for models. You know, I'm going to teach girls how to wear clothes and show them to advantage to others. We're going to start work on it to-morrow. I'll be pretty busy after that, you see."

"Yes, I see." His eyes lowered. They were honest eyes, Marcia thought. It would be easy to hurt him. Too easy. He didn't have any defenses at all. But he flattered her. He was so eager about the show. "I want you to like it, Marcia. I didn't know, but a man at the hotel said it was good. It's 'Stepping Stars.' You haven't seen it, have you?"

She hadn't. But she felt the need to be a little cruel. She wanted to see him wince as she had winced when Jack Grant said, "Don't talk that way." She told him, "Only part of it. We didn't stay."

"Oh!" He seemed actually stricken. "I'm so sorry. I— Wait. Maybe I can change the tickets. Of course, I ought to have asked you. It's my fault. But——"

"That's all right," she said regally. "I'm sure I'll enjoy it. With you." So he was appeased and they went to the theater on Randolph Street to see "Stepping Stars." It was the same theater, Marcia remembered suddenly, where Edna Best had been an usher, where Edna met the Russian Molinoff, who later let her be kidnaped, who started a whole chain of tangled events. Edna! She grimaced a little. She had not heard from

Edna since Edna gave up the fight and went home. Back west somewhere. Now she was keeping house for her father, Norene had told her. Satisfied.

"Not me," Marcia said aloud.

"What, Marcia?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

So they saw the show. Jerry went out at the first intermission and came back with candy for her. She wanted a cigarette. But somehow she felt she would better wait. She had no reason for trying to make him go on admiring her, but she did not want him to feel badly. He was being as kind as he could.

The show was over finally and it had not been a very good show. The music was stupid and the comedians were not funny and the hero was marceled into stupidity. But Jerry was excited about it, pleased.

"We don't see many good shows out west," he said. "They just don't get out that far, I guess. And, now, what would you like to do?"

"What would you like to do?" she returned.

"Go somewhere. If you're not too tired. But, you see, I don't know where to go. If you'd tell me——"

She told the taxi driver, "Club No-name. On Ontario, east of the drive."

So they went to the club where Mittner had given her the champagne party, where the whole idea of the school for models started. Where she had met Jack Grant! She thought, "It's silly my going there." But she thought, "I might see Jack." With the blond woman? Maybe. And what if he was with the blond woman? It wasn't any of Marcia's business. If he was there—Funny, she thought, how a woman insists on hurting herself. But he wouldn't be there.

She looked around the dark, crowded room. She saw the same faces—but not really the same—and the same

conversations were going on—although these were not the same people who were talking. Nothing ever changes in a place like that. Each night is like every other night. And the man from the Southwest was not on the piano with the O'Brien woman, but another man was. This other man was tall and somber and his smile was a lie, but he was passable copy of the other man.

The O'Brien woman waved at her—a little mockingly.

"They know you here, don't they?" Jerry asked admiringly.

"Yes. I come here sometimes. They remember, you know." She explained in a tone that she meant to imply. "But, of course, they would remember me."

They sat at a table close to the dancing floor. Marcia watched Jerry, his head turning this way and that, looking at people, excited, his eyes bright. This was really a big evening for him. And a year ago it would have been Marcia's big party of her life. "I've changed a lot," she thought. "I'm really city people now. I'm all over with the country stuff."

They danced. He danced very well, smoothly but with not too much art. He held her hand a little gingerly; he seemed to be afraid of holding her too closely. She said almost grudgingly, "You're really clever on the dance floor, aren't you?"

And he answered: "No. But you're wonderful. Maybe you'll teach me some of those steps?"

So she did. She did not like doing it. She did not want anybody to think she was with a man who did not belong. But she owed him something for being so kind, so adoring. She owed him something because when Jack Grant didn't call up he did. So she danced with him twice, and when they rested he asked: "Would you like something to eat now, or would you rather wait?"

She said, "No. Let's dance some more." It was a

good orchestra. She felt suddenly gay. After all, Jack Grant didn't mean so much. He wasn't—not really—half as nice as this boy, half as courteous, half as much a gentleman. And——

She saw Jack Grant come into the place, and the blond woman was with him, and all at once the gayety was gone. She was angry as Marcia Talent had never been angry before. At what? She didn't know, really. At Jack Grant. At the blond woman. At herself for caring. At Jerry Kerrigan for dancing on, smiling, smiling at her, taking it for granted that everything was all right and that he was important to her.

She said suddenly, "I've danced enough. Let's sit down." Without waiting for him to answer she started through the crowd, back to their table. She could see Jack Grant and the blond woman at their table across the room. He had not seen her. But he would. He would look around in just a moment and see her and if he smiled it would be the kind of smile that would hurt.

"I'm sorry," Jerry said.

"I wish you'd quit saying 'I'm sorry' all the time," she snapped at him. "You know you're not. It's just a line. It doesn't mean a thing."

"But it does. I am sorry. I guess maybe I made you dance too much. I told you I wasn't very good."

"Quit apologizing," she snapped at him again. Then, "I'm hungry now."

He called the waiter hurriedly. He ordered for her, sat back looking at her, puzzled, his face troubled.

"Maybe you'd like to go now?"

"No. Of course not. I like it here. I'm crazy about it. Can't you see how crazy I am about it?"

He shook his head.

"I guess I'm not a very good hand at taking a city girl out for the evening," he said, miserably. "I—

That man is looking at you. I don't like that. I——"

"I know him. That's Mr. Grant. He's all right. Never mind about his looking at me. He's known me longer than you have."

"Oh!" He subsided in his chair, quiet now and not even watching her, looking down at the cloth before him or at the dancers, but carefully not at her. Presently the waiter appeared, loaded with dishes. "I ordered a lot of things. I thought you might be hungry," Jerry said.

"I am," she answered curtly. She began to eat. She loved food, loved to eat. Any man who sat across a table from her at lunch or dinner was amazed that so small a person could eat so much with such relish. Yet she was charming about it. She was like a tiny kitten attacking a large bowl of cream. Men liked to take her to dinner because she was like that. And Jerry, watching, forgot to be hurt by what she had said. He thought only, "She's so cute, so awfully cute," and said breathlessly, "I like to watch you eat. I sure do."

"I'm glad you enjoy it. I— What is it, waiter?"

The waiter bent over her, handed her a folded slip of paper. She read it, not ever apologizing to Jerry. On the slip was written:

"You shouldn't be here. Go home."

It was signed "Jack."

She caught her breath. Ordering her to leave a place? With that sort of a note? She turned. He looked at her over the blond woman's shoulder. His face was impassive. But there was something commanding in his absolute impassivity. There must be some reason for his ordering her that way. Because he didn't care to

have Marcia there when he was with the blond woman? No. She assured herself, "That can't be it. There's something else." She went on eating, trying to decide what to do next. Go home as he told her? But no man could tell her what to do. She didn't have to take orders from men. Not even from Jack Grant. Just because she was going to work with him. For him, really. Just because he thought that gave him the right to control her actions.

She said to Jerry, "The music is good. Let's dance again."

He leaped up, jerked a chair out of her way, took her in his arms with an almost convulsive movement, and swung her into the midst of the throng. Now she could not fell Jack Grant's eyes. She had shown him. He couldn't tell her what to do. He——

"Forgive me," Jerry said. "I know it's none of my affair. But—I couldn't help wondering about that note."

"Just a business appointment," she said. "The man who wrote it is going to help me start my new school."

"That old man?"

"He's not old. His hair is white, but he's really young."

"I see." He didn't, really. She could tell he was faintly angry, that he wanted to demand the truth. But he knew he had no status, so he said nothing. They danced. They sat down. The waiter brought coffee. Marcia drank her coffee slowly, and all the time she felt Jack Grant's eyes on her back. Then all at once she stood up.

"I want to go now," she said.

"But——"

"I want to go."

"Of course."

He got up, tossed some bills on the table, covering the check, and went with her along the side of the dance floor. He took his hat and coat from the check girl, then turned to speak to Marcia. And she was gone. She was not inside the club. She was not at the foot of the stairs.

## CHAPTER XIV

"I'M LOOKING for a lady," Jerry said to the doorman, alarmed, his voice shaking. Something might have happened. She might have been—a small girl. She wore a black wrap."

"Oh! Miss Talent, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" The man began to laugh. He looked at Jerry Kerrigan and laughed on and on. He said to the taxi driver who stood next to him, "This guy just lost Marcia Talent." Then he dropped.

"I'm sorry I had to hit you," Jerry Kerrigan said quietly, rubbing his knuckles—the same knuckles he had injured that morning. "But you shouldn't laugh at a man when he asks you a question."

"Why—" The doorman put his hands back to push himself up.

"No," Jerry said quietly. "You'd better stay there. And don't you other boys get into this. Don't do it."

They stood still. Three taxi drivers, a bus boy, a waiter out for a smoke and a passer-by all stared at Jerry Kerrigan as at a prehistoric monster. A man who dropped Toughy Novak like that, and grinned about it, and kept on being polite! They didn't bother him. There was no use being foolish about it. Toughy could take care of himself. And Toughy did. He said very humbly, sitting there on the ground, "You wanted to know where Miss Talent went?"

"Yes."

"She got a taxi and said she was going home. She said to tell you not to bother."

"I see. Driver—let's go."

So Jerry Kerrigan, his jaw set in a way that might have surprised Marcia Talent, rode downtown to his hotel, went to his room, packed his bags, came downstairs, wakened the sleeping clerk, said: "I want my bill," paid it, got back in the taxicab and said "Tanager Hotel." That was where Marcia Talent lived. And within twenty minutes that was Jerry Kerrigan's address also. He had a room on the fifth floor. For a dollar the night boy had told him that Marcia Talent's room was on the fifth floor.

So Marcia came downstairs the next morning at ten-fifteen, fresh, her hair shining in the soft light through the long drapes over the lobby windows, her eyes shining —ready for the day's adventure. And Jerry Kerrigan got up from the low divan where he had sat since eight o'clock and said very simply, "Good morning, Marcia."

"Jerry!"

"Me, myself. I thought— Well, a lady didn't ever drive away and leave me like that before. And I thought maybe I'd ask you what it was about."

"Nothing. Nothing, of course." What could she say to him? The tall simpleton! He stood there almost laughing at her. He wasn't crushed a bit because she went away and left him last night—because she hurried home, thinking of the order Jack Grant had given her. Jerry was as sure of himself as ever. "I just——"

"You just don't want to talk about it. Isn't that it?" he asked.

"Why— Yes. I can't, Jerry. It was something— I can't tell you about it now. Later——"

"That's all right," he said. "I'll be right here. I moved in last night. Now I'll take you downtown."

He did. He put her into a taxicab and gave the driver the address and he sat back, silent, his profile sharp against the glass, his eyes watching the people going downtown, toward the big busses, toward the shops. Until they came to his building and to the elevator.

"I'll call you this evening at seven," he said. "Good-by, Marcia."

He disappeared into the crowd. And Marcia, riding up to Jack Grant's office, making up speeches, getting ready to tell Jack Grant, "You can't order me around." found all at once that she was thinking about Jerry Kerrigan. He was a strange boy. He would be hard to handle, she thought. Men! But she could handle any man. Even Jack Grant.

The small girl in Grant's outer office leered at her.

"Your appointment was for this afternoon," she said. "Not this morning."

"But I wanted——"

"Mr. Grant said your appointment was for this afternoon. He said you were to meet the girls at"— she consulted a card— "at 219 East Superior. It's a house. He said he wouldn't be down at all but he'd call you. That's all he said."

She turned back to her typewriter, and Marcia, after a moment, went out of the office. Might as well get breakfast. Might as well have stayed with Jerry, for that matter. He'd have been glad to take her to breakfast. But he was a little bit too sure of himself to-day. He'd have to get over that.

So she ate alone. Then, since she had sixty dollars—or almost—she went shopping. She didn't intend to buy anything. There was nothing in the world she really needed. But in the second shop she saw a handbag. It was square, terribly plain, expensive. She bought it. She gasped a little when she saw what buying the hand-

bag did to her money. But it looked very smart with her gray suit. She walked out feeling a little better. She went into two other shops but she restrained her desire to buy. She bought only a pair of gray stockings—and changed into them, for the shade seemed to match her suit a little better. Then she went up to a beauty shop and had a manicure. Then she had a lettuce and tomato sandwich and a glass of grapefruit juice. Then it was time to go to 219 Superior and meet the other girls. So she took a taxicab up Michigan Avenue.

The cab swung into Superior Street. They were old buildings there mostly. Once smart people had lived there, proud of their homes, proud of the gingerbread work in brick and stone, proud of the front stoops and the tall plate glass windows. Now there were signs that announced "Rooms for Rent" and other signs—on buildings a little gayer in paint, a little more dilapidated inside—that said "Studios." She scanned the numbers. It should be right along here.

It was—219 was a three-story building, narrow and seeming inordinately tall, of red brick. A flight of four stone steps ran up to a big door in the exact center of the front. To each side was a wide, high window. Windows of the second floor were even taller and wider. The third floor had dormer windows and the building came up to a sudden absurd peak thereafter. There was a tall ornate chimney of brick, in the English style. There was an iron grille in the big door.

She paid the driver and went up the steps. There was a heavy iron knocker, painted black. She raised it tentatively, dropped it. She was sure eyes were on her, peering from somewhere. She was suddenly afraid of this place. It seemed so dark and so empty inside.

Nobody answered her knock. She knocked again. Then she could have sworn she heard footsteps, going

away, going away softly. Then there was silence. She knocked again. There was no answer.

She tried the door and the knob turned in her hand. She stepped in. There she was in a small room with a flight of stairs curving up at one end—this had been the hall of somebody's smart home. A door opened to the left. She went through it into a long, narrow, high-ceilinged room. In the exact center of the left wall was a fireplace with a flat mantel. There was a great mirror, specked and ancient looking, fixed in the wall above it. A chandelier hung down, its long crystal pendants still brave, still challenging admiration.

The floor was mantled with dust, but somebody had been in the room. There were footprints leading from the wide front window through the wide-arched door into what must have been the dining room, on to a door which was closed. Footprints coming from the door. Footprints going back again.

There was no sound in the house but Marcia felt that someone had been here only a moment ago. There was the feel of someone in the room. There was—she sniffed suddenly. There was the smell of tobacco.

She did not want to open that door to which the footprints went. She did not want to see whoever had been in the room. She was afraid. Soon she was so frightened that she stood rooted in one spot. Her hands began to tremble, her face went white, her breath came quickly, her heart was pounding. All this and nothing had happened; she had not really seen anything or anyone; the footprints might mean nothing at all. But she was shaking with fright.

She turned like an automaton, then. She went back through the door and into the hall and suddenly ran headlong to the big door, jerked it open, slammed it behind her.

Now, standing on the steps, watching people walking past, seeing a fat woman across the street washing windows, looking into the sunlight toward Michigan Avenue where cars and busses passed, she felt almost safe. But she did not look in at the window.

She was still standing there, nervous, not quite perfect now as a spectacle, her hair a little out of trim, her lips a little pale, when Hélène Goodman and Doris Dean appeared, walking slowly, laughing, looking up at her with definite insolence, definite dislike.

She said, "Hello. I'm Marcia Talent."

The taller girl, who wore black, cut very long, tight and almost startling in its smartness, said "Oh!" Then in a moment, casually, "Yes, I've heard about you. There was something about you in the papers, I think."

The other girl, who wore green, from dress to shoes, bag and hat, echoed "Yes." Then, in a moment, with a cutting turn in her voice, "I believe we're supposed to talk to you?"

"Yes," Marcia said firmly. "Yes. You're going to talk to me." So they wanted trouble. They thought because she was a model—not a society girl, not a designer of smart clothes—they could insult her and get away with it. They could patronize her from their height and make her like it. They'd learn better.

"Come in," she said. She pushed open the door and led the way into the house. She was not afraid to enter now. But she noticed a strange thing. She was sure that when she was in the house before the door into that next room had been ajar a little, a very little. Now it was closed tightly. But— There were new footprints near the door. Someone had come through the door, had watched, had gone back and closed the door. Closed it after him? Or after her? She couldn't quite tell from the dusty footprints. She was afraid to study them, to

think about them. She shivered in spite of herself, turned to face the others, found them smiling at her with a sort of a smile a pretty woman hates.

"What's so funny?" she asked coldly.

"Oh! Nothing." The tall girl had a trick of letting her words trail off into emptiness. A trick that could make you very angry.

"But you think there's something funny, don't you? Me perhaps?"

The Dean girl accepted the challenge.

"I wouldn't say that. Still——"

"Better get over it," Marcia said, her words cut out of single pieces of cold metal. She did not talk that way to Jack Grant or even to Jerry Kerrigan or to Mittner; not to any man in the world. But when she talked to women, for women, she knew, were born her enemies, she could make them afraid. She was small but there was a cold purpose and a knowledge and a willingness to fight in the way she stood and the way she spoke that was not encouraging to those who tried to put her down. She said, "Get over the idea that you're going to do any laughing at me. I know my job better than either of you know yours and I'm running this place and if you don't think I am you can try to start something. I think you'd better remember it."

"Nobody is running me," the tall girl said. "I'm——"

"Oh, don't worry. I know who you are. Your father runs a store, doesn't he?"

The tall girl's face flamed.

"You said?"

"I said I don't care if your father runs a dime store or the biggest store in town and I don't care if you're Doris Dean or Henrietta Crosley. It's all the same to me. If you're going to work on this thing you'll be Doris Dean and there won't be anything more to it. That's all."

"I——"

The voice of Hélène Goodman cut in, dripping with honey that was not authentically sweet.

"Oh, let's not fight. After all, we've got to get along. With all those girls coming and everything. Don't you think so?"

She addressed her words carefully to Marcia. She was going to be on the right side, Marcia could see. And she put down against Hélène Goodman a wide black mark and said to herself, "I don't like her. I wouldn't trust her at all. The other is conceited, but that's all. She'll get over that. But Hélène— Well, there will be plenty of time." She said aloud, "Let's sit down and talk it over. Shall we?"

They looked around. There were no chairs. No furniture had come in. The walls had been cleaned. But there would be plenty of work to do.

## CHAPTER XV

"I've got some sketches here for the decorations," Hélène said brightly, turning to Marcia and Doris. "See? Like this? Or this?"

They talked, then, about decorations, about a scheme which would have the woodwork done in black, the walls in pale silver. The mirror would have to come down. The fireplace would be all right, but it ought to be lacquered in black. The chairs should be modern, the new kind with legs and backs of twisted white metal. There should be only a few lamps. They could put a sort of stage across the far end of what had been the dining room. And a piano at the right. Then the models could dress upstairs and come down and walk across the room and on to the stage. That, Marcia said, would teach them the hardest thing a model has to learn—how to walk downstairs gracefully. And they could fix up a sort of kitchen in the back room.

"Let's look at it," Doris Dean said.

"Well, I— All right." Marcia looked down at the footprints. The others hadn't noticed them. But she did not want to open that door. She dreaded it. Yet— "Come on." She led the way. She opened the door and looked into a bare room. But the floor here had been swept clean. No footprints showed. Why had someone swept this room and not the rest of the house? She didn't know. She'd ask Jack Grant, though, when she saw him. Funny, how little she had thought about Jack

Grant. She ought to be home pretty soon. He'd be calling up.

"Good range," Hélène said practically. "And an electric ice box. And plenty of closet space. Why—there's some food up here!" She pointed on the shelves. There were cans of corn and tomatoes and soup, and a box of sugar, and some coffee, and even a loaf of bread, wrapped up in paper. And a couple of apples. And an empty bottle. Hélène took down the bottle, sniffed, giggled. "Swell!" she said. "Hard to get, too. Look." She pointed at the label. "Cassis. That's a very expensive liquor. Whoever's been living here knows good stuff, all right." She set down the bottle and did not seem really to want to know anything more about the mysterious occupant. But Marcia wondered who the occupant had been. It was supposed to be an empty house. That was what Jack said. Nobody was here. And still— There was a coffeepot on the stove. She lifted the lid. There was coffee in the pot, and the grounds were still damp. Somebody had made coffee not very long ago. It had boiled over. And she could smell that acrid tobacco again.

"What's down here, I wonder," Doris said, pointing at a door at the left, near the stove.

"I don't know," Marcia answered.

"Let's look." She tried the door. It was locked. "That's funny. I suppose that goes down to the basement. We'll have to get a key."

"Of course," Marcia agreed. But she was not at all sure she wanted to know who had been in this room or what was in the basement. So she said brightly, "Let's go upstairs and look things over." She led the way into the next room, up the stairs, not looking back—a little glad she did not have to look back.

There were four big rooms on the second floor, high-

ceilinged, each with a large closet. There was a huge bathroom.

"They built houses with lots of room in the old days," Hélène commented, as though she had made a discovery.

"They did," Marcia agreed absently. She looked at her wrist watch. Four-ten. She'd better hurry.

"We could use these two front rooms for dressing rooms," she said. "And the others for designing and making costumes. How would that work?"

"I guess that would be all right," Hélène said. "What do you think, Doris?"

There was no answer. And then both realized at once that Doris was not in the room. They looked at each other. Suddenly Marcia was terrified. She shouted wildly, "Doris! Doris! Where are you?" There was no answer. She ran into the hall. And Hélène—sensing something of Marcia's panic—ran after her. "Doris! Doris!" Marcia stood on the stair landing, listening. She heard nothing. She called again, more loudly, with terror choking her, "Doris!"

From up above them, somewhere, she heard a muffled answer. "Yes. What's the matter?"

"Doris! Where are you?"

"Upstairs. Come on up. I've found something funny. Come on up."

The girls ran down the long hallway, to the door which opened on the steep stairs to the third floor. They hurried up the stairs, came into another hall, narrow, dusty, redolent of age. There were only two rooms here, one on each side. And through a dormer window at the end of the hall, scarred with the dust of years, came a faint, rather awesome light.

"In here!"

They turned into the room at the right. They saw Doris, her face smudged, her hair rumpled, standing in

the center of the room. They saw a bed, tumbled, the covers pushed back. And on the bed just one thing, that made them step back, that set chills crawling up their backs.

It was a machine gun. Marcia did not need to ask what it was, nor did Hélène. They had seen pictures of those things in the Chicago papers. They had read about the things that were done with machine guns. And here one lay, on a bed where no bed was suppose to be, in a house where no one was supposed to live.

Marcia's eyes raced around the room. There was a small table, with an old-fashioned oil lamp on it. On this table were a couple of books and a clasp knife. And there was something amazing, more amazing than the machine gun—a woman's pocketbook, small, smart, black.

Marcia picked up the pocketbook, opened it, dug her hands into it. She brought out a roll of bills, a compact, a lipstick, a couple of postage stamps, a key. Nothing else. No cards. No letters. She turned the pocketbook inside out. There was no name in it.

Gingerly, Doris Dean touched the machine gun.

"Don't," Hélène screamed at her. "Don't! It'll go off! Watch out!"

"No," Doris said. She laughed. "It won't go off. I won't give it a chance. But, Marcia, what is this all about?"

"I don't know."

"Do you suppose somebody has been hiding here? You know, there was a shooting the other day and—who do you suppose it could be?"

"I don't know."

She mustn't tell them about the footprints downstairs, about her feeling that there was somebody in the house when she first came. They'd be frightened away. They wouldn't go on with the models' school. They——

"We'll ask Jack Grant," she said suddenly. "He'll know what to do. Somebody may have stolen a key or something."

"But let's get out of here right now," Hélène said, her voice shaky.

"Yes," Doris agreed. "Let's. The sooner the better."

They left things untouched. But Marcia took the handbag with her under her arm. She thought: "The woman who lost this will want it. It's too good a purse to want to lose. And when she sees me with it—" Then what? Well, nothing probably. But she took the purse, anyhow.

They hurried downstairs, not looking back, each one listening for a sound each one feared to hear, but hearing nothing. They hurried out of the house, slamming the door behind them, and the sunlight seemed warmer than it had ever been before.

"There's a taxi," Doris said. "Let's get it and go down and see Jack Grant now. Come on!"

The three got into the taxi and drove away, sitting close together, united now in a common fear of that strange house and of what had been in that house.

And what was still in the house, looking down at the street as the girls got into the taxicab and drove away, chuckled and went back downstairs and had a drink out of the bottle of cassis. It was pretty good stuff.

Jack Grant's office girl blinked. One of them she could suppress, could be insulting to. But three—that was different. Particularly when one of the three was Doris Dean, wearing casually the label that to the office girl said, "Society girl." So when Doris said, "I want to see Jack Grant, and I want to see him now," the little girl blinked and said, "Yes, ma'am," before she caught the word, then changed it defiantly to "You wait. I'll see

if he'll see you." But she scuttled into the next room like a frightened beetle under Doris Dean's glare.

There was the sound of Jack Grant's voice, raised a little. There was a wait. Then the girl, looking still frightened, came through the door again and said, "You wait a minute. He'll ring."

"All right."

Doris, as captain of this army, took the chair. Marcia stood watching Hélène. And Hélène got out a pad of sketching paper and began drawing something on it.

"What are you drawing?" Marcia asked Hélène finally.

"You. I've got an idea how to dress you. You know, you don't wear your clothes right. Not really. Now, what you ought to have——"

She began volubly to explain, to point out possible color combinations, to draw with quick and—Marcia admitted it grudgingly—expert strokes.

"You see?"

"Yes."

You might as well agree with her. Now, at least. After Jack Grant straightened out things it would be different. She'd be boss then and Doris Dean could get over her society stuff and Hélène would have to quit toadying; she'd have to work and be all right or she could get out. And Jack would see to it. It was going to be nice to see Jack, too. She had missed him. Jerry? The two men were so different. Jerry was just a nice boy, a boy who'd do things for you and who thought he was pretty good and who was polite and didn't know his way around. You wouldn't catch Jack Grant asking a girl what she thought was the right place to go. He'd know without asking. He knew all about things like that. Jerry was just a boy from the West, really a kind of cowboy, even if his people did have money. He wouldn't really

know about a thing like this mystery, for instance. And he'd probably be scared to death about the house. But Jack wouldn't.

The buzzer leaped into momentary activity.

"Go on in," the office girl said, not raising her head, her whole pose saying plainly, "And I don't care if you never come out!"

So they went into Jack Grant's office and saw behind the big desk, his white hair smooth, his face young, with thin lips smiling, his eyes direct and searching and not at all impressed.

"Hello," Doris said curtly.

"Hello, Mr. Grant. I'm so glad to see you again." That was Hélène.

But Marcia said, "Hello, Jack. Sorry I didn't get to see you at the club last night." It was a direct challenge to the others. And Doris Dean, looking at Marcia with level, superior eyes, took the challenge.

"You're old friends, I suppose?" she asked. A light chuckle half sounded in her throat.

"Why——"

"I've known Miss Talent several days," Grant said shortly. "What's the trouble? Couldn't you find the house?"

"Oh, yes, we found it all right," Doris said. "That was easy. Miss—Talent?"

"Talent," Marcia said, her prettiness a little marred by her anger at this tall, arrogant girl.

"Miss Talent? Oh! She was already there. And when we came along she let us in. It's not bad. I can do some things with it, I think."

"You?" Marcia demanded.

"Yes, I. That's right, isn't it, Mr. Grant? That I'm to be in charge of fixing up the place? That's the agreement on which I'm putting in the money, you remember."

"Of course. That's right, Marcia. You haven't had any experience in decorating, anyhow, and that's Miss Dean's specialty. So——"

"But you said—" Marcia began helplessly.

"I said you'd be in charge of the models. That's right. You'll head the school for models; Miss Dean is in charge of the place; Miss Goodman is in charge of the costumes. That's the way I want it."

"But—" Marcia looked at him appealingly. But his eyes were as opaque as gray stone. There was no friendliness in them at all. He had forgotten all about that first night. Or had he? She thought she saw a faint gleam, somewhere deep in his eyes. Maybe he was just fooling the others, making them think there wasn't any—any— Maybe that was it. That must be it.

So, quickly, Marcia's conceit constructed a new armor, built up a new conviction. Those others couldn't possibly mean as much as she. Not Doris, with her tall, clumsy, inept body and her face that was not really pretty, only beautifully kept. Not Hélène, with her small, pinched features and her thin arms and legs. She was much prettier than either one of them. She knew how to wear her clothes and, really, Doris didn't; Doris merely put on what the modiste told her was right and wore it somehow. And Hélène was not important. Anybody who made a living just drawing pictures couldn't possibly be important. She——

"All right," she said, smiling. "That's all right, Mr. Grant."

## CHAPTER XVI

If Marcia had to play a rôle, she decided, she would play it better than either Doris or Hélène. She could get what she wanted before she was through; she didn't have to worry now. Jack Grant would change. Only— So Doris Dean had money in the place, too? And so had Mittner. Doris had to pay for a job, then. That was really a compliment to Marcia.

"Now, I want to talk to you about that house," Doris was saying.

"What about it? You said it was all right."

"It is, except— Well, I'm afraid somebody else has been using it. We don't seem to be alone in the place."

"Impossible!" Grant jumped up and came around the desk, his face sharply etched in the late sunlight. "Impossible! That house has been empty for two years."

"So? How do you know?"

"I know because I rented it and I went all over it."

"Did you go up on the third floor?"

"I—no. Of course, not. Why?"

"Well, I found a bed that had been slept in not very long ago. And a nice little thing on the bed."

"What?"

"A machine gun. A perfectly good 1930 model machine gun."

"I don't believe it!"

"Ask Marcia. Or Hélène. They both saw it, too. And there's food in the kitchen and somebody had been making coffee."

"Some tramp got in, I suppose," Grant said. Marcia wondered why he was so quick with that theory. Still—"That must be it. I'll tell you. I'll go out there now and look over the place. You girls want to come along?"

"Not I," Doris said. "I've got a dinner engagement. I've got to go home and get ready."

"And I've got a big date," Hélène said.

Marcia saw her chance. All right, if they wanted to play into her hands—if they weren't any smarter than that——

"I'll go with you, Jack," she said.

"I—" He walked back to the window, looked out a minute. Marcia could have sworn he was laughing. But why? There wasn't anything to laugh at. He turned around. "All right, Marcia. Let's go. And you other girls—can you get there at eight in the morning?"

"Eight?" Doris was actually shocked. "Why, man, that isn't even daylight!"

"Oh, yes, it is. And that's when your girls will be showing up. I've got ads in all the afternoon papers to-day and there will be more ads to-morrow. For 'Manikin.' That's what we'll call the shop. Just the one small word."

"How about dresses?"

"I'll get a few until we start going. And Marcia—you're all ready to teach the girls what to do?" His eyes were mocking and Marcia flared at the mockery.

"I'll teach them," she said. I'll teach them more than anybody else could, anyhow." She hoped Doris and Hélène understood what she meant. But they didn't seem to be interested. They started to leave and Hélène took Doris' arm, which Doris removed with a final quiet gesture. "Don't," she said. "I hate to be touched." Hélène flushed, but she followed Doris out meekly—

servant now to Doris, as to-morrow she would be to Marcia if she thought Marcia was the stronger.

"Now," Grant said, "we'll get going. I didn't want them along, anyhow. That Dean girl is altogether too sure about herself."

"She is," Marcia agreed. "Come on, Jack."

He led her toward a door at the side. "Private exit," he said. "Comes in handy sometimes, when there are too many customers."

Oh! Private exit. And there had been—had there been two voices in the office a while ago? Or three? Three, she was almost certain. The voice of some woman. She was almost sure of it. But——

Smoothly, as Jack Grant turned to open the door, she picked up a small package which lay on a chair. He did not see her do it. There was not time to look at the package now. But she got in into her purse, unseen. She followed him.

When they got out of the taxicab in front of the house on Superior Street, Jack Grant still had not said more than, "Nice warm afternoon, isn't it?" and "You look very well to-day." But as they went up the steps he said suddenly, "Better wait here. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you." The way he said it made him seem different, again; now she felt as she had felt about him that first night; now he was as solicitous as he had been after she fainted. She liked it. Well, he'd give in. They always did.

"All right. I'll wait."

He closed the door behind him, and she waited. Minutes passed. She sat down on the stone railing and opened her bag to get a cigarette. There was the package, small, square, wrapped in dark paper. No cigarettes. Funny. She'd bought a package. No. Not so funny.

This wasn't her pocketbook. This was the pocketbook from the table on the third floor. Her own was inside the house somewhere. Jack would see it. He wouldn't miss a thing like that. And he'd think— There was money in this purse. He'd think, when she told him about taking the bag, that it was the money she wanted.

With nervous fingers she tore open the package. It was a compact. It was an exact duplicate of the compact in the bag, the one she had seen upstairs. She opened it. Good powder. But very, very dark. Much too dark for her. A blonde seeking a certain effect might use powder like this. A blonde?

She jumped up.

A blonde would wear powder like this if she were a certain sort of blonde. The blond woman with Jack Grant at the club! Of course. She had that kind of a make-make-up. Dark and with startling crimson lips against ashen blond hair. Of course!

She looked up quickly. She heard steps inside the house.

She stuffed the compact back in the bag, snapped it, held it under her arm on the side away from the door. Maybe Jack hadn't seen the other purse. Maybe——

Jack opened the door and looked at her.

"Come in," he said at last.

Quietly, she obeyed. She preceded him into the big room. She looked at the floor. No sign of footprints now. The floor had been swept!

She stared at him, waiting.

Finally she asked, "Did you find it— Upstairs?"

"What?"

"The machine gun?"

"Oh, yes. I found it. And I called up the landlord. He explained everything. There's been a caretaker here, a sort of harmless old man who thinks he's a gunman.

He's had the machine gun for a long time. I told the landlord to send over and take the stuff away to-night and get the old man another job where he won't be frightening people. That all right?"

"Of course."

A harmless old man? With a machine gun on his bed? A harmless old man who knew a woman who carried a handbag like this, full of money, and wore powder that cost four dollars for a refill?

All at once, Marcia Talent noticed a thing about Jack Grant that made her wonder about him more than she had wondered before. And she had never seen it until now.

He had only three fingers on his right hand. Two fingers were gone at the palm. And down the back of his hand there was a long, livid, terrible scar—the kind of scar a knife might make. A knife in the hand of somebody who tried to kill. A knife——

"Let's go," she said.

"Not afraid of this place, are you?"

"Why—no. Of course not."

"Then—afraid of me?"

"I—you know I wouldn't be. You've been so—nice to me."

"Oh!"

"But I wondered——"

"You've been wanting for hours to ask me why I sent you that note last night, haven't you?"

"Yes. I have. I don't think it was any of your——"

"You don't think it was any of my business? Well, it was. You're working for me, now. I don't want you hanging around places like that. Not with anybody. Your job from now on is to stay close at home and not go out at all unless I know where you're going. You've got to be absolutely O.K."

"I am. You know that."

"Surely. But everybody else has got to know it, too. Understand?"

"Why?"

He shook his head.

"Can't you think for yourself a little? Here we're asking a lot of people to put up money to put their girls into a models' school—something brand new. And if some of those people should see you around a place like the No-Name— Well, use your head. You know how they'd feel. We wouldn't stand a chance."

"I see." But she didn't. He talked well and he sounded right, but she wondered if he was really telling her what he meant. Or was it——

"But you were there with somebody?"

"Oh. What of it?"

"I don't see why——"

"You don't see why you can't go out if I can. Is that it?"

"Why—I don't mean that. But——"

"But you didn't like seeing me there with the blond girl?"

"No," Marcia said bravely. "I didn't. I think— Well, I don't think she's——"

"Wait a minute," he said in a flat voice. "Don't try to tell me what you think about anybody you see me with. I don't take that from you or anybody. You'd better go on home now, anyhow. I haven't got any more time to talk. Come on."

He was coldly, silently angry. He looked straight ahead, but she knew if she could look at his eyes she would be more afraid than she was. She huddled down in a corner of the taxi, silent. She got out in front of the hotel, still silent. Then she ventured, "Good night, Jack, I'll see you to-morrow."

He looked at her for a while without speaking.

"Yes. I suppose so."

Then he went away. And Marcia turned into the hotel, started toward the elevator, stopped because she could not go any farther. Because Jerry Kerrigan stood in front of her, smiling broadly, holding a bunch of red roses in one hand.

"This is the silliest thing I ever did in my life, I guess," he said. "Sitting down here holding roses in my lap for you to come in. But— Here."

He thrust the flowers into her arms. A thorn pricked her and her eyes flashed. She raised the roses over her head, and threw them in Jerry Kerrigan's face. Then she ran into the elevator and the door clanged behind her.

Stop her and make a fool of her like that! Sit around holding red roses! Red roses for her! Laughing at her. Laughing at her and handing her roses and pricking her hand with the thorns!

She slammed the door behind her, locked it, called the desk.

"If a man named Kerrigan tries to call me, I'm not in and I won't be in," she said. "Don't forget."

"I won't, Miss Talent," the clerk promised. "He—he ain't bothering you, is he? Seemed like a nice fellow. But I saw you just now and I wondered——"

She hung up. Who cared what the clerk wondered? Or what anybody else thought? Or what Jack Grant said to her and the way he said it and the way his eyes looked and——

She called information on the telephone.

"I want the telephone number at 219 East Superior," she said.

She waited a long while. At last the operator's voice said, "I'm sorry, but there is no telephone at that number. What was the name, please?"

"I don't know."

It didn't matter, anyhow. She hung up. She picked up the pocketbook and dumped its contents on the bed and stared at them.

The blond woman had been in that house. She was sure of it. And somebody else was there still. And when Jack Grant said he telephoned the landlord he lied. He couldn't telephone the landlord. The telephone wasn't connected. And——

To-morrow she had to go back to that house. She'd have to be there early and open the place and spend the whole day there going into dark rooms and letting Doris Dean boss her and watching Hélène Goodman toadying to Doris and——

And what? She did not know. But all night long she dreamed about footsteps, crashing on the dusty floors of an empty house. And about faces that were not faces at all, but only shadows in the house on Superior Street.

## CHAPTER XVII

THERE was a rap at the door. Marcia called, "Who is it?"

"The bellboy, Miss Talent."

She opened the door to face the red-haired little boy, who was her particular slave.

"Flowers, mum."

He held out a long gray box, grinning. He winked.

"Got a new one on the list, Miss Talent?"

"Jackie!"

"Sorry, mum."

"Who gave them to you?"

"Mr. Kerrigan. That cowboy guy."

"What?"

"Yes, mum; he gave me the box and he said I was to come back and tell him what you did with the flowers. That's what he told me. He"—hopefully—"he gave me a dollar."

Marcia stared at the box, at the boy. Then she handed him two dollars.

"You go back and tell him I threw the box in the wastebasket. Understand?"

The boy grinned knowingly.

"Sure. You just pitched 'em away. Maybe you jumped on 'em too?"

"No. You go tell him."

She shut the door. She put the box on the bed, opened it. There would be red roses again. Like the ones she threw in his face. No. These were white. They were

small roses, not yet open. They were expensive roses.

She looked for a note. She found a card—Gerald Thomson Kerrigan—and on the back she read:

"Something must have happened. Maybe I could help. I'll call at eight."

She sat down and stared at the white roses and at card, and tried to solve the puzzle of Jerry Kerrigan. Any other man— She couldn't even do that to Mittner and not make him mad. He'd walk away and he'd never come back. And Jack Grant— He'd probably try to kill her. And any boy she knew—any boy would be hurt and he would tell her about her meanness or he would be servile and apologetic and she would despise him. But Jerry Kerrigan wasn't servile; he wasn't apologizing. He was being courteous, kind, forgiving her with the manner of one who says, "You acted badly, but of course, there was a good reason, so it doesn't matter."

She pursed her lips. And then she went to the telephone and told the clerk, "When Mr. Kerrigan calls, put him on my line."

"But you said——"

"I've changed my mind."

"Oh!" The clerk laughed a little, hung up.

Then Marcia went about the business of getting ready to see Jerry Kerrigan. And as she dressed she lectured herself. This man had money. He was a gentleman. He was strong and ready to do anything to help her; he didn't talk about what he would do; he didn't seem to expect anything in return; he was the kind of man who could be very helpful in any kind of trouble. And she might need him. She assured herself, "It's only because of that you're going to be nice to him." She insisted, "You're not interested in Jerry Kerrigan at all." But when she looked at the roses again she smiled softly, and in the softness, the kindness of her eyes, there was

a Marcia Talent whom Jack Grant would not have recognized.

She answered the telephone with a soft "Yes?"

"This is Jerry Kerrigan, Marcia."

"Jerry! I'm so sorry. Please forgive me for the way I acted a while ago. I didn't mean—I——"

"That's all right, Marcia. Let's not talk about it any more."

"But I feel so——"

"Did you like the white roses better?" There was a chuckle in his question.

"Yes. Yes. Much better."

"Then you didn't throw them away?"

"I—what do you mean?"

"Well, the little boy came back and told me you gave him two dollars to say you threw the roses away. So I gave him two dollars for telling me. And——"

"Jerry!" she ought to hang up on him. He was taking things absolutely for granted. He seemed to think that —that they two shared some secret, some understanding. She——

"That was all right, wasn't it? Good business."

In spite of herself she laughed. Then they both laughed. Then they talked about the weather and about the way the sunset had looked and about nothing at all and that went on for minutes. Marcia was not thinking about the models' school or about Jack Grant. She was only talking to somebody who was young and who had nothing mysterious or dubious about him and who laughed because he wanted to. She was happy.

He cut in suddenly, "How soon may I see you?"

"Why, I—I've got an engagement. That is——"

"I'll be waiting at the elevator in half an hour."

"Oh—I— All right, Jerry." There was something

almost submissive in her voice. It was nice to feel—dominated.

She went downstairs in that same mood, a younger Marcia, smiling about nothing in particular, her eyes less tired than they had been for days. She looked at the little bellboy, made a terrifying face, laughed.

"You'll be rich yet," she said.

"Sure thing, Miss Talent. So I can marry you."

She looked past him at Jerry. He seemed younger to-night than ever. He wore light flannels, his tie was dark, already there was something urban about him. She felt a little sorry. She had liked the look of clothes that were not quite made for him. But he looked—she admitted it almost grudgingly—very much like a city man now.

"Yes," he said. "I got it to-day. I'm spending all my money for clothes right now. Got to look as if I lived here, you see."

"Of course."

Quite naturally, she put her small hand in the crook of his arm. She felt again the lean hardness of his muscles. He would be a good man to have on your side if there was trouble, she thought. She could—yes, she could use him.

The small monitor who guided Marcia Talent, who told her, "Fight! Fight every man!" whispered now. "Tell him about the house on Superior Street. Maybe he'll be able to do something. Anyhow—use him if you can."

So while they sat at dinner (he knew where to go, this time; he told the driver, "Pullman Building," and he took her up in the ancient creaking elevator to the quiet restaurant overlooking the lake, where he ordered quickly and simply and well; he had progressed very much in a few days, she thought) she told him about Jack Grant and Doris Dean and Hélène Goodman and the house on

Superior Street. And most of all about the room and the machine gun on the bed. And the footprints. And all that she had imagined and that she feared.

"It doesn't sound possible," he said finally.

"About the house?"

"No. The whole thing. I guess I'm too western. Getting started out in business that way is too much for me."

"You mean you don't think I ought to be in it?"

"I don't know anything about that. You know more about Chicago than I do. But—that machine gun business. That worries me. See here—" He paused. Then, "No. I'm sorry."

"What were you going to say?"

"Nothing."

She pursued him. "Tell me."

"Well, couldn't I do something? Go over there and look things over or go there with you in the morning. I'm no detective. I don't know anything about Chicago, really. But maybe I could help."

"No," she said. "I couldn't let you do that. I don't think Mr. Grant would like it."

"What if he didn't?"

"He's the one who started the school," she said. "I've got to do what he says. That's only fair."

"I suppose you're right."

He sat back in his chair, his eyes half closed, watching her. He did not speak for quite a while, and she grew restless under his stare, until finally she blurted out, "Well, is there something wrong?"

"Not a thing. I was just trying to remember you."

"What do you mean?"

"You're so pretty, you know. I've never seen anyone half as pretty as you are. And I—I just want to remember."

"Why do you keep saying you want to remember?"

"Well— I've got to go home in about a week. My father isn't very well and I ought to go home and help out. Maybe I won't get a chance to come back at all. Not for a long time, anyhow. And——"

"Jerry!" There was honest concern, honest sorrow in Marcia's eyes. "I'll—I'll miss you a lot, Jerry."

"I don't see why. Just one more cowboy."

"That's not fair. You mustn't say things like that about yourself. That isn't what I think. I——"

"What do you think about me, Marcia?"

"I think you're awfully nice to me. And—I like to go out with you."

"Nothing more?"

His eyes were very large when he looked at you, when he kept looking. And his face was appealing, but not as Mittner's face was, not as any other man's face was. Warm. Warm and sharply etched and decent. He— She mustn't. She mustn't let any man bother her. Not even Jack Grant.

"I think we'd better not talk about it any more," she said suddenly. "It just—just makes us both unhappy." So she said by inference something she assured herself she did not mean at all. She thought Jerry should be satisfied. But he did not seem to be. Evasions did not content him. She thought, "He thinks so simply, so directly, that he doesn't fool himself like most men." But she said, "That's all I'd better say." Then, "Shan't we go?" She flashed her bright small smile at him.

"Yes, Marcia." He paid the check, tipped the waiter, helped her with her light coat, followed her from the dining room. She could see his tall figure marching into the mirror at the end of the hall. He ought to be wearing chaps and a sombrero, she thought, not city-made flannels. He ought to have revolvers hung low at his

waist. His hair and his high forehead, his lean face, his wide shoulders, his arms—he could step back half a century and be a frontier gunman without change. People stared at him. On him was the indefinable stamp of the West. It was in the way he walked and in the way he carried his head, the way his shoulders moved, the grace of his walk. He— He was handsome. No use calling him ugly any longer. Ugly, because he wasn't sleek and smooth and carefully tailored. Handsome, because he was real. He——

Marcia Talent remembered at this moment Gordon Wales and the way he looked the first time she saw him, the way he looked at her, the way he kissed her that night when she was locked out on the street. Funny. She hadn't thought about him much. He didn't really matter any more. He was married, he had Norene, he was happy. But now she understood for the first time how Gordon must have looked to Norene McCann, how Norene must have felt about being with him, how she could be proud and breathless with pride. She understood that Jerry Kerrigan had become important. So important that she must do something at once to hold him off, to shake off the power over her which he had taken into his hands without effort, without any words. And the small monitor in her brain insisted wildly, "You can't let go! You mustn't! You mustn't let any man matter to you. You've got to fight men."

He took her arm as they walked out of the office building on to Adams Street, but she drew away a little.

"You know," she said, "I don't like to have a man take my arm that way. It reminds me of the way the country boys used to walk with their girls on Saturday night out home."

"I see." He walked a little farther away from her, his chin up, his eyes not quite so gay.

## CHAPTER XVIII

JERRY said to Marcia, "I have a surprise for you."

"What?"

"Let's take a taxicab up to the Wrigley Building."

"Why?"

"I'll show you when we get there."

So they rode up Michigan Avenue slowly, in the midst of the long river of automobiles that swirls between the cañon walls of buildings. He dismissed the taxi, said, "This way," led Marcia down the winding steps to the wharf below the Michigan Avenue Bridge. She stopped, halfway down.

"Taking me for a boat ride?" She indicated the placards that shout, "A ride on Lake Michigan for $2."

"Wait and see. This way."

He took her by the arm again and his hand guided her gently.

"How do you like it?"

At the edge of the wharf lay a long, lean speedboat, its prow sharp as a razor, its windshield canted back jauntily, a pennant at the stern. The boat had two seats only. It was painted white, with a thin red line along the gunwales. It rode high in the water.

"Whose is it?"

"Mine."

"Yours!" She did not believe him, of course. Some stupid gesture, she told herself. Just to show off. The western idea of a big thrill. But——

"I love the water," he said. "There's quite a lake

around our place out home. And so I got myself a boat. I thought you might like to take a ride in it. Would you?"

She looked up at him. He seemed taller, in the half darkness beneath the bridge. And he seemed surprising. He did things so simply. No man she knew—not even Mittner—could achieve so simple, calm, an attitude as this. The boat must have cost—how much? At least five thousand, she thought. And he said simply, "I got myself a boat!" He must—he must be richer even than Mittner. But he didn't act like it. He didn't spend much money and he didn't talk about money.

"See here, Jerry Kerrigan," she said, "you needn't show off for me. Where did you get this boat?"

"I told you. I bought it."

"But it must have cost a lot."

"Not very much," he said negligently—with honest disinterest. "Wouldn't you like to go for a ride?"

"Can you run it?"

"Yes."

She stepped daintily into the boat, snuggled down in the deeply cushioned seat.

"All right, Jerry. If it's really yours——"

He sat beside her. As his hands fell on the wheel he took on a new eagerness. He looked down the river, toward the lake. He stepped on the starter and the motor roared suddenly, the echoes rattling against the steel framework of the bridge above them. Marcia had one confused glimpse of faces staring at them from the wharf. Then the boat shot out into the river in a wide curve, headed for the lake. They roared past gloomy, cavernous warehouses, close to a tall steamer tied up at a wharf, past a tug that rested from the day's labors, suddenly into open water. The lights of Navy Pier were just ahead. Now she heard music, from the band

playing far out at the end of the pier. Now the wind struck her and she gasped, ducked down below the windshield. And the boat leaped ahead in great, joyous bounds headed into the blackness of the lake, toward a single red winking light—a lighthouse far out in the lake. And they swung around the pier in a great arc. She saw a tall white candle, back toward the city. The Palmolive building, brilliantly lighted, slim and graceful. And the tall towers of buildings downtown, of the tall north side apartments. A long sweep where small lights moved hurriedly. Lake Shore Drive. And ahead of them was blackness, pitch blackness. As far as she could imagine there was night and emptiness. No. There was an excursion steamer, small, squat, waddling like an old fat lady. There went another speedboat, its red and green lights seen for a moment, lost.

"How fast?" she shouted against the wind.

His head did not turn. He stared ahead, his face grim and finely drawn.

"Thirty-five."

It seemed they must be going faster than that. But then she remembered what people had told her about speed on the water—how much faster you seemed to go than when you were on land. And the motor roared louder and louder. The wind drove at her, lashed her face.

"How fast now?"

"Forty-two."

The boat rocked, lunged sidewise, straightened out again. Then they were heading back toward Chicago. The whole amazing panorama of Chicago at night was leaping at them, racing to meet them. Lights everywhere, like great piles of diamonds thrown heedlessly along the shore. Buildings, where no lights showed, ominously black against the deep blue velvet of the sky.

Buildings where every window was a small pin prick of gold. The pier. A ship coming out, its siren tooting dismally. Then the sudden cachinnating shrieks of a fireboat. A tug chugging. People on the pier. People in cars crossing Michigan Avenue Bridge, far ahead. The bridge raced at them. The buildings of the Loop were over them, were upon them. And the boat's roaring thunder was stilled, the boat drifted suddenly toward the wharf, the motor barked again for a second, they bumped lightly against the concrete, and Jerry deftly tossed up a rope, caught it around a post, said quietly, "Well, here we are."

She got out of the boat, back to land, with an odd feeling of sadness. They had been out perhaps half an hour. Probably not so long. Yet she seemed to have lived a long while. Her cheeks were cold, cold from the wind. But her heart was pounding. She laughed shakily, caught Jerry's arm.

"I loved it. Jerry—I loved it!" She couldn't think of anything else to say to him; she didn't want to talk. She wanted to remember what she had seen and she wanted to remember him as he looked when they sped into the lake. She held his arm now without thinking, she felt no desire to draw way from him, she had forgotten that, being a man, he was her natural enemy.

Heat leaped at them from the street as they climbed the stairs to Michigan Avenue. They were in a taxicab in a moment.

"North," Jerry said briefly.

They joined the procession of automobiles again. The driver was clever. He shot in and out among the cars, taking breathless chances. They passed the Drake. The sweep of the Oak Street beach was before them, black with the shadowy figures of people, loud with the cries of late swimmers. Then Lake Shore Drive and the tall

apartments. On north. North and into a neighborhood where there were only small apartments, where the lights of small neighborhood stores glimmered quietly. Into the country. Into the country and on until there were glowing knives of light slashing the dark aehad of them.

She had not spoken since they left the Wrigley Building. Nor had he spoken to her. There was no need for speech. They were close, they were drawn together in a sort of quiet, simple happiness. And Marcia knew that she had never been so close to anyone in her life before, had never forgotten herself and the things she wanted so completely, had never been as sure with any man as she was with Jerry Kerrigan.

Now she asked, "Where are we?"

"This is Sky Harbor," Jerry said.

"Oh!" She remembered. The airplane harbor. That was what they saw—the searchlight on the field. And here was the Petrushka summer club.

They went in. They found a quiet table, they sat down, they talked about things that did not mean anything—about the woman at the next table who was being unbearable to a patient and earnest waiter, about the long drive, about taxicabs, about Chicago. They said nothing about the boat, about the ride into Lake Michigan. They said nothing about each other. And both of them knew that they did not need to make conversation now; there was a sort of understanding that had come out of nowhere, that was theirs. They were quiet and happy and content.

So it was very late when they went back to Chicago. They had danced, but only a little. They had eaten, but with no interest in food. They had watched the Russian comedians and listened to the singers, but with no excitement.

Marcia found that her hand still nestled in the crook

of Jerry Kerrigan's arm. She ought to take it away. She ought to— She fell asleep. She slept, like a tired child, her face at peace, her face soft now, beautiful in the moonlight streaming through the taxi window. Jerry Kerrigan, watching her, was sure that she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

He roused her in front of their hotel.

"We're home," he said. "Wake, child."

She yawned, without shame.

Then, "Oh, Jerry! I—I guess I fell asleep. I'm so —so sorry."

He laughed, gently.

"Don't you be sorry, Marcia. I liked it. You were so tired."

He took her arm as a matter of course now, and they walked to the elevator. He said, "Good night. We'll have breakfast in the morning, won't we?" She said, "I'd like it, Jerry. I'd—love it." Then she said, "Good night." The elevator door closed behind her.

She thought, entering her room, "He didn't try to kiss me." She thought, "I'm glad he didn't. I—I'm awfully glad." She thought, "I want to see him in the morning." She said to the small monitor in her mind, "Be still."

And Jerry Kerrigan, standing in front of the hotel, not ready to sleep, awake and eager and gay, struck his hand into his palm suddenly, said: "I'll do it," walked south. He walked down the drive, down Michigan Avenue. He turned east on Superior Street, counting the numbers, indistinct in the night. He came to the tall brick house where to-morrow Marcia would go to work —where, in a room somewhere in the pile of aged brick, Doris Dean and Marcia and Hélène Goodman had found the machine gun.

He stood on the sidewalk regarding the house. It was

dark, forbidding. Empty of all life. Nobody moved or breathed inside its old doors. He smiled. Maybe Grant was all right after all. Maybe——

He stopped suddenly.

For a moment, for a moment only, he had seen a faint quick gleam of a tiny window up under the eaves.

He waited. He did not see the light again. Minutes passed. Eyes might be on him now. Or there might be nothing. He might have dreamed it. He——

He saw the gleam again.

Now he moved swiftly. There was a narrow passage between the brick building and the studio building next door. He slipped into the clammy darkness of this passage, went softly toward the back of the building, came to a brick wall, put up his hands, leaped lightly, dropped into the walled back yard of Marcia's school building. He waited. He could see nothing. He heard nothing. Yet something electric warned him. Something, someone, was watching him. Somewhere in this yard eyes stared through the darkness, fixed on him.

He moved forward, one step at a time. One step. Two. Three.

The lights went out for Jerry Kerrigan and he sprawled in the gravel, face down, unconscious.

## CHAPTER XIX

MARCIA waited. She had waited in the lobby for ten minutes, she waited now in the dining room for fifteen minutes. And Jerry Kerrigan had not appeared. Her small foot tapped on the floor, her gay smile was gone. Men did not make Marcia Talent wait. Not even Jerry Kerrigan. After last night, after the way she had felt——

She began to listen to the small monitor saying, "You were a soft little fool. Just some fresh air and a boat ride and a ride out in the country and dinner at a roadhouse and you—you forget everything. Little fool!" Her eyes grew hard. She said firmly to the hovering waiter, "Bring me a honeydew melon. Nothing else." She said a little later, "Will you have Mr. Kerrigan's room called, please?"

The waiter returned, smiling obsequiously.

"They say that Mr. Kerrigan does not answer, Miss Talent."

"Thank you."

She got up from the table, leaving the melon untouched, paid her check, hurried out, disregarding the clerk's "Good morning," walking past the doorman without a word, not even hearing him ask, "Taxi, Miss Talent?" She was late. She'd have to hurry or Doris Dean would be there first, superior, arrogant, faintly insulting. And Hélène Goodman, covertly insolent, fawning. Both of them against her. And there might be girls already answering Jack Grant's ad. Girls wanting

to know how to walk into a room and how to wear an evening wrap and how to do their hair and how to hold their heads.

When she turned, into Superior Street she saw a crowd. Girls? There were girls in front of the brick house in a phalanx, a regiment. Her heart thumped. All those strange girls to meet, to subdue, to guide, to impress. How many? A dozen? More than that. Twenty? More than that. Waiting. Talking a little. But mostly waiting.

What should she say to them? Shout loudly into the midst of their murmurs, "I'm Marcia Talent; I'm going to teach you what you ought to know"? Just walk past them and unlock the door and say, "Well, come in and let's get started." No. She'd have to register them all, ask them questions, find out what they knew. Ask questions and listen to their answers and be interested and friendly and impressive. And she was small. Most of the girls were tall, she saw. Marcia did not like tall girls. They worried her because they looked down at her; she always felt they were smiling down at her pityingly. But—men liked small girls. Men—Jerry Kerrigan—Jack Grant— Men!

She walked through the press of girls, up the steps, turned to face them.

"I'm Marcia Talent. I should have been here earlier. I hope you haven't been waiting very long."

"Oh, no."

"Only a couple of minutes."

"Hello, Miss Talent."

Words like that, and appraising eyes that studied each detail of her, from her hat to her shoes. Eyes that might be laughing a little, that might be impressed and envious, that would watch everything she did and analyze it and pick flaws, twist her gestures and copy them and

try to improve on them. Eyes watching and ears listening to each inflection of her voice, minds busy already with the problem of Marcia Talent.

"Come in."

She opened the door and the girls trooped in after her.

There were no chairs. She could not say, "Sit down and I'll talk to you one at a time." There was no one to help her. There was a stool near the fireplace and she could use the window seat for a writing desk.

"We're really not ready yet," she explained hurriedly. "The lessons will not start until next—next Monday."

"Oh!" They seemed disappointed. Her quick eyes saw one dark girl nudge the girl beside her, saw the covert smile on the girl's face.

"But I'll register you now. I want to know all about all of you. I can't tell you how to start learning to be good models until I know what you're like, you see."

She began.

The first girl was short and dumpy, with a thick, ungraceful neck. But she had well-shaped legs and ankles, Marcia saw, and her hands were good. She had a clean sort of pleasant face, not pretty at all. But if her hair were cut short, drawn back tightly, bringing her ears into plain view, outlining the good shape of her head; if she were taught to stand up well, to forget the slouch she must have practiced for years, to keep her shoulders straight and not to eat so much—she could become a type, a good type, a good model.

"Your name?"

"Mary Sopusek."

"I mean your real name."

"I— Oh! Hedvig Sopusek. But I like Mary."

"We'll worry about that later. Where do you live?"

The girl told her. Far out on the west side, Marcia thought. She must have started here early in the morn-

ing. She must have sat up late last night planning the way she was going to be dressed. And it was all wrong. That dress with that fur! And her shoes were not right; they made her feet look big when really they were not.

"How much do you weigh?"

"A hundred and twenty-nine."

"You'll have to lose about nineteen pounds of that."

"But I——"

"I said you'd have to lose about nineteen pounds."

Marcia was firm, now, speaking in clipped sentences, sure of herself, sure of how these girls could be handled. They would start out distrusting her, disliking her. That was natural. She was better dressed than any of them; she knew that they felt the rightness of her walk, of her carriage, and distrusted it; but she knew also that each one of them envied her in secret, would try to be like her.

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

Marcia looked at her a moment.

"I mean—seventeen. But I always pass for nineteen."

"I see. That's all for right now. The next girl?"

The next one moved slowly, languidly. She was chewing gum. Her jaws moved in a rhythmic rocking motion, mechanical in its orderly monotony.

"Your name?"

"Uh—my name is—Bessie Delaney."

"Why do you want to be a model?"

The girl preened herself, struck an attitude.

"I guess I ought to be a good one." She gave them the benefit of her beauty, turning a little, posing.

"I guess you wouldn't," Marcia said curtly. "You go home and learn to look alive and forget to chew gum and maybe in a couple of weeks I can talk to you. But not now."

"Say, look here, Miss—whatever your name is—this is a school, ain't it? And I guess if I want to go to this school I can. I guess——"

"This is a school, but it's my school and I'm rather particular about the material I work with," Marcia said quietly. "Good day, Miss Delaney."

The other girls stared, stepped back a little. The girl glared, reddened, looked around. Then, without saying anything, she moved languidly toward the door, her jaws still working in orderly rhythm, her pose undisturbed, her arrogance as great as ever.

And Marcia said, "Next one?" knowing now that she had established herself, that she could master these girls as she chose.

So she went on asking questions. One girl, then another. Every sort of girl. Tall girls and short girls, fat girls and thin girls. Five she rejected altogether. She said to each one, as kindly as she could, "You simply aren't ready." She did not go into details. No use telling a girl with obviously hennaed hair, "You look so artificial that no woman would like to see you in a gown she was thinking of buying." No use saying to a small girl with jet black eyes and a sharp, hungry face, "You look mean and cheap and cruel. People wouldn't want to see you." No use saying, however much you pitied her, that the fat girl never could be thin, never could change her looks, never could throw off the burden of flesh nature had put upon her.

So at last there were thirty-eight girls left in the room, accepted and registered. Now they began to ask questions. How would she teach them? How much time would they have in each lesson? Would they get separate instruction or did they have to work in a class? Would the school really find jobs for them? How could they know if they had any chance to succeed as models?

"I'll teach you everything I've learned as a model and as part owner of a modiste's shop," Marcia said. "There will be two other instructors. Miss Doris Dean—she's really a very prominent society girl, but you're not supposed to say anything about that. And Miss Hélène Goodman. She's the designer. You'll like them both very much."

"That's all very nice of you, Marcia," Doris Dean drawled, standing framed in the doorway, her clothes shouting "costly," her pose shouting "society girl." The girls stepped back respectfully, watched her, all eyes, forgetting Marcia. Doris's entrance was like the grand entrance of a stage queen. She came slowly across the room, sat down on the window seat, called then in her precise, carefully cultured voice, "Come on, Hélène. Come on and meet our pupils." She achieved the manner of a queen bestowing the largess of her smile on grateful subjects. And Marcia saw that the girls accepted it; they saw a hallmark on Doris Dean, they were sure of her social knowledge and her social importance as well.

Marcia broke the spell by saying in a flat voice:

"That's all for to-day. You can go."

"But——"

"Im sorry, but we can't start the lessons until Monday. You——"

"How about the money for lessons?" one girl asked.

"That should be turned over to us Monday morning when school starts."

"All right, Miss Talent."

They filed out, one by one, looking back, fixing in their minds details of Doris Dean to be retailed at home, summing up the items which made Marcia's costume. Outside the door they began to laugh and talk loudly, as they had not dared to laugh or talk in the house. Marcia

heard their voices receding down the street. Then she turned to face Doris Dean.

"Quite a line-up, isn't it?" Marcia asked.

"Rather interesting. But they're impossible."

"No, they're not. Most of them have possibilities."

"You mean to say a girl like that blonde who stood by the door could ever learn how to make people look at her?"

"Easily."

"I don't see how."

Marcia smiled a little, not quite kindly. "You know," she said then, "being a model is an art, whether you think so or not. You know—I could teach you things about walking, Miss Dean."

"Teach me?" A faint laugh of polite disbelief.

"Of course. Do you want me to show you what I mean?"

"I don't think I'd be interested. I'm quite . . . I'm . . ."

"Quite satisfied already. All right."

The atmosphere of feminine enmity tingled in the room. And Hélène put in her voice for the first time.

"But you see you're talking about models and that's different from the way a girl—well, a girl like Doris—ought to walk. You see what I mean?" She was patronizing, nicely feline, her face bland, but her eyes unfriendly.

"I see exactly what you mean. Shall we get busy on the decorations and other things?"

"I've got a man coming in a few minutes who'll do a rush job on the work," Doris said.

"All right. I'm having the costumes sent over—the ones I had on hand. They will do to get started with."

"I'll probably have to fix them quite a lot," Hélène said.

So they talked about the dresses, about getting a sewing machine, about the girls and how much they would pay. Thirty-seven girls paying a hundred and eighteen dollars each for ten lessons—"about four thousand dollars," Hélène said.

"That's not so much, at that," Marcia ventured.

"That's very good for a start. And we'll charge commissions on whatever jobs we get for them. And there'll be more girls. That's just the first of them."

## CHAPTER XX

"I WONDER about the machine gun. Do you suppose it's gone?" Doris asked Marcia and Hélène.

Marcia told them what Grant had said. She offered no theories, did not tell them about the compact, did not suggest any possibilities. Somehow it seemed that she ought to keep the secret—if there was a secret. But she was sure that now there was no one in the house. So she said quickly, "Let's go look."

Hélène held back, her thin face dubious.

"I don't like to—go wandering around."

"Don't be silly," Doris snapped at her. "Come on."

They went upstairs, up the second flight. The came to the third floor room. They stood a moment outside the closed door, a little nervous now. Their nervousness quickly grew into active fright. But Doris kicked the door open, looked in, laughed.

"All clear," she said.

The room was empty. The bed and the table were gone. The floor had been swept. There was no sign of any occupant.

They went downstairs, down into the kitchen. The food was gone. They found the basement door ajar, and went slowly down the steps, into a well of cool darkness.

"I'm not so crazy about this," Marcia confessed.

"Nor am I," Doris answered. Where's the light switch, I wonder?"

She fumbled along the wall.

"Ah."

Sharp white light flooded the basement, now outlining the big furnace, throwing long shadows past the wooden pillars which supported the floor. There were six strong lights at strategic points in the basement. Marcia thought, "Funny to have so much light in a basement." Things were not like that in houses back home. But it was not important. They inspected everything. The room had once been a vegetable cellar. Another room with a door, on which there hung a rusty padlock. Inside were shelves, a couple of empty, dusty bottles. "The wine room," Doris volunteered. The coal bins, empty. The furnace, clean and shining with fresh whitewash. The floor seemed to be on new cement. "Funny they put down a new floor," Marcia said. Nobody answered. They came back toward the stairs leading up to the kitchen. And Marcia saw something that should not have been there at all.

On the floor, near the steps, lay a small golden hairpin. She did not touch it. The others did not notice it there. Marcia followed the others up the stairs.

A golden hairpin in a basement where no woman had been! Could Doris have dropped it? Or Hélène? Impossible. Doris didn't wear hairpins, least of all that color. Hélène's—she could see one hanging loosely in the heavy coil of black hair on Hélène's neck—were black, long. It couldn't be hers. Then——

A woman's compact filled with dark powder. The shade for a blonde who wanted to be startling. And now a golden hairpin. For a blonde. Of course.

The blond woman with Jack Grant? But how could she have got into this house? And if she did get in, why should she be in the bare, empty, gloomy basement? And if it was not that blond woman, then it was another blond woman. Who? And what was she doing there? And did Jack Grant know about it?

Marcia knew now certainly that strange things were going on in the old house. She knew that some kind of mystery was growing, and somehow the very unimportance of her clue—a compact, a hairpin—made the danger seem greater, made violence seem more imminent.

She trembled a little. She did not even hear Doris Dean's comment on the kitchen and its possibilities—"Do the wall in a pale green. Do the woodwork in a deep black"—because her mind was fumbling the few facts she had, experimenting with them, trying to work them into a pattern.

Soon after, she got away. She had begun to wonder about Jerry Kerrigan again. But now she did not feel so much anger as bewilderment. He had seemed so engrossed in her last night, so anxious to please her, to be with her, yet he had not even bothered to call this morning. But—could something have happened to him? That wasn't possible. Probably he simply forgot. Or he overslept. Something as casual as that. She insisted to herself, "That's all there is to it." And the small monitor cut in: "What if he didn't call you? Why should you care about him? Why should you care about any man?"

So as she said good-by to the others and started back to the hotel she was already phrasing the cold final speech with which she would dismiss Jerry Kerrigan, with which she would send him away and make him sorry he forgot and make him understand that he was not wanted.

She entered the hotel lobby. And as he saw her the clerk dropped his pen, ran around the desk, ran toward her, crying, "Miss Talent! Oh, Miss Talent! We've been trying everywhere to find you."

"Why, what's happened? What is it?"

"Mr. Kerrigan. He—he—" The clerk's face was purple with the effort to quell his excitement.

"Mr. Kerrigan? What's happened to him?" The small monitor and the cold speech alike were forgotten. Terror gripped her.

"He—got hurt. They've got him at Henrotin Hospital. He wants to see you right away. Somebody slugged him. The police were here and they're waiting to see you down there. He's—he's pretty bad off. He's——"

Marcia ran headlong out of the door, called breathlessly to the starter, "A taxi quickly!" got in, called to the driver, "Go as fast as you can to Henrotin Hospital."

Then she slumped back in her seat. Jerry! Jerry hurt! The house had struck at last. The house had begun its tragedies. She was sure of that.

Jerry lay very quiet, his face covered with bandages, his hands lax on the covers. But as he heard Marcia's voice at the door he moved restlessly, his bandaged head turned, he seemed to be fighting to see her. The two men who had been talking to him stepped back, stood politely.

"Jerry! Oh, Jerry! You poor boy. You——"

Marcia dropped on her knees beside the bed, her arms across his body, holding him close, sobbing. And he chuckled.

"Hello, Marcia. Sorry about not meeting you at breakfast. But I had—another engagement." He chuckled again.

"Jerry! Don't laugh! Are you— Are you—" She couldn't go on. But the nurse interposed, smiling.

"He's going to be all right," she said. "Just bruised. He got a pretty bad blow on the head and we thought at first it was fracture, but it's not. He'll be out of here in three or four days. Don't you worry, child."

They smiled at her, all three of them, as people smile at a girl who is in love with a man, who holds him, who pities him when he is hurt and wants to help him. They

smiled, but with the kind of soft smile that is half envious, half sad.

Marcia patted Jerry's lean brown hand. And his strong fingers closed on her hand, held it tightly.

"I'm glad you came down," he said. "Mighty glad."

"I couldn't come any earlier, Jerry. I didn't know until just now. I thought—oh, I thought——"

"You thought I just forgot, Marcia? Well, I did. For a while, anyhow." Again the chuckle. And the men chuckled, too.

Then Marcia's questions began to rain upon him. "What happened? Where? How did it happen? When? Who did it?"

They told her, "He was lying alongside the road at Irving Park Boulevard and Cumberland Avenue. Out on the old airport road."

"Jerry! What happened?"

He told her, "I guess, I was held up, Marcia. I don't know."

One of the men interposed, "But they didn't take his money. You still had your wallet when they found you. Are you sure it wasn't—something else?"

"You think I'm a gangster and somebody took me for ride?" he asked from behind the bandages, chuckling again.

"Well— No. Not that. But—why don't you tell us what really happened?"

"Because I don't know. I left Miss Talent last night and walked toward downtown, and finally I decided I'd like to walk along the river. So I went on the lower level under Michigan Avenue bridge and walked there and somebody came out from behind a post, and that's all I remember."

"Got any enemies you know of?"

"None here, anyhow."

"How long you been in town?"

"About three weeks."

They waited a while longer, but Jerry did not offer anything more. And once Marcia said, "But Jerry—the house—" and he coughed sharply. She caught the cue, stopped.

"What house?" one of the detectives demanded.

"We were talking about—about a house," Marcia said. She dimpled, flushed a little. The detectives nodded wisely, smiling.

"Oh, sure. Well, you can go ahead and buy your house pretty soon. I guess your young man didn't get hurt much, at that," one of them said.

Then, finally, they went away. And then the nurse nodded to Marcia.

"You'll have to go, too, I'm afraid."

"But Jerry—I want to talk to Jerry. Just for a minute."

"He's got to get some rest."

"I will go, nurse, in just a minute. Leave us alone a minute, first, won't you, please?"

The nurse smiled.

"All right. But don't make it very long."

She disappeared, and at once Marcia moved back to Jerry's side, caught his hands in hers, fondled them, put her cheeks near his.

## CHAPTER XXI

"JERRY—you're sure you—you're going to be all right?" Marcia looked at Jerry anxiously.

"Of course. I got kicked harder than that lots of times, playing football. My family goes in for armor-plate skulls, Marcia." He chuckled reassuringly.

"But—Jerry, what really happened?"

"You're not to tell anybody about it."

"All right. I won't. I promise."

He told her then about going down to the house on Superior Street, about going into the back yard. He said, "Somebody was there."

"Who?"

"I haven't any idea. I only know I heard something moving and then something hit me and the lights went out. Then after a while I thought I was in a car, going fast, but there was a sack over my head. I was all doubled up on the bottom of the car, I think, and I was too numb to yell or move. And then they threw me out and I guess I passed out again. And then some farmer came along and saw me and picked me up and put me in his car and got me into town and called the police. That's all."

"The house on Superior Street!"

"Yes. I stood out in front for a while and I thought I saw a light up on the third floor. Then I saw it again. That was what gave me the idea that I'd like to go around the house. I'm sure someone was there."

"And so am I."

She told him about the compact; about the powder, about the golden hairpin. She told him about the blond woman and about Jack Grant's lie.

"He couldn't telephone anyone. He couldn't. There isn't any phone. But everything was gone to-day. The machine gun and the bed and everything."

They were both silent then. Jerry's fingers stroked Marcia's smooth, small hands. His fingers were very cool and strong. They closed on her hands suddenly so tightly that it hurt, that she stifled a cry.

"Oh—I'm sorry, Marcia. I was thinking about that house. About—Grant."

"But he couldn't have anything to do with it."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Well, he's a business man, a respectable one. Mr. Mittner knew him well. He wouldn't have any reason for doing anything like that. Jerry, do you suppose something is going on there that he doesn't know about? Someone using the house or hiding there at night or something like that? Do you suppose that's it?"

"Then why would he lie about the telephone?"

"Perhaps because he knew I was frightened and wanted to reassure me until he could get the stuff moved out."

"That might be it," he said. But he seemed unconvinced. At last he went on, "I'll tell you the truth, Marcia. I'm beginning to wonder about Grant. Could I meet him? I'd like to—just to see what he's like."

"Of course, Jerry. Just as soon as you get well. But you'll have to stay here four days. That was what the nurse said."

"Four days?" He laughed. "I'll bet you a hat I'm out of here by to-morrow morning."

"But, Jerry, you mustn't. You'll get worse if you don't rest. Please don't get up. Please stay here until you're all right."

"I'll be all right when I leave. But I've got to leave soon. Marcia, I can't let you take chances in that house. I— Oh, Marcia—" His voice trailed away.

"Yes?" she prompted, in a very small voice.

"Marcia—I've only known you a few days. I shouldn't say anything. You don't know me, really, and I've got no right to say things to you. But—I——"

The door opened.

"Time to go, Miss Talent."

The nurse walked to the bedside, a tall doctor in white behind her. She took Kerrigan's pulse, pursed her lips, shook her head reprovingly.

"You've got yourself all excited, young man. Your heart's pounding like a bass drum. Young lady, you better go on home or you'll have a very sick young man for a sweetheart."

"But—he—" Marcia blushed, turned away, quickly, turned back, caught Jerry's hands, kissed them, ran out of the door, calling, "I'll be back to-night." And she left the hospital in a sort of daze. And she discovered suddenly—at first she would not believe it, the small monitor sneered, her whole being protested—that she was in love with Jerry Kerrigan.

It was a new feeling for Marcia Talent. She never before really had loved anybody in her life. Her father and mother—they did not understand her, did not really approve of her, resented her for being different. And men she had known—casual, childish love affairs, of course, in school and after. For a little while, Gordon Wales, until her mind told her, "He's not your man and you don't want to marry." But now she realized with a shock of amazement that if Jerry Kerrigan had no money at all, if he were to be crippled for life, whatever he was, wherever he wanted her to go, she would go with

him without any thought of holding back, without any fear.

Nothing like this had ever happened to her before. And it should not happen now. She had so much to do. She who had never had anything until a little while ago wanted so much from life. Marriage—marriage meant giving up things, meant binding yourself to things. Marriage? Would she marry Jerry Kerrigan if he asked her? She didn't know. But she was sure—very sure—that she loved him. And she was sure of something else. Somebody had hurt Jerry Kerrigan at that house on Superior Street. And he was her man. If somebody had hurt him she would find that person, she would make him pay, she would make him sorry for what he had done. She knew that absolutely, and already she knew the first thing to do. She was going to see Jack Grant now. She gave the taxi driver new orders. Her small chin set squarely, her clear eyes were determined, she beat her knee with a small hand and said aloud, "I'll make him talk. I'll find out. I'll help Jerry." Then she lit a cigarette and composed herself into the Marcia Talent whom Jack Grant knew.

She seemed to change, to grow hard. But there was a part of Marcia Talent that would not change again as long as she lived. She knew it.

She paid the driver, went up in the elevator, went to Grant's office. She opened the door. The little girl was not at the desk. The office seemed to be deserted. But from past the partition she heard low voices. The voices of women. Not Grant. He could not be there, or else he was being silent, listening, waiting.

She moved closer to the door that led to his office. She listened, her head close to the door. At first she heard only an indistinguishable murmur. Then she recognized the voice of the small office girl.

"I won't do it? You bet I will. If Jack Grant thinks he can treat me like that, I— You can't bluff me. You can't!"

She was hysterical, her voice was rising. But against it there beat flat, cold, chiseled tones. The voice of an older woman, of a woman very sure of herself. The same voice Marcia Talent had heard from that office once before, on the day when somebody went out through another door just before Marcia entered. The blond woman? It must be. The voice was right. The voice fitted the woman she had seen, with the picture of the woman she had made in her mind.

The woman said only, "You'd better not say a thing to anybody. And I'm not bluffing. I'm telling you. You'd better not say anything."

"What would you do?"

"Plenty."

There was a long silence. Then Marcia heard sobs. The office girl was crying, softly, beaten—at a loss what to do.

"But I can't go on with this. I can't. He said he——"

"Said he'd marry you, maybe?"

"No! No! No!"

"He won't anyhow. Don't let that worry you. But don't you talk. Don't you ever say anything about this office, or about anything you think you know. Understand me?"

"Please let me get out of it. Please."

The older woman laughed, an unpleasant, metallic laugh.

"You got yourself into it. Your father and the rest of them——"

"Don't talk about my father."

"I don't need to, any more."

Then there was silence. Marcia moved closer to the

door. No sound. Closer still. She heard the girl's quiet sobbing, now. Nothing else. Then the older woman spoke again.

"Well I'm going. Have you anything you'd like to say?"

"I—" The girl's voice choked. "I—oh, I hate you. I hate you! You're keeping me in this and you——"

Marcia heard a sudden, sharp blow. And the girl cried out. "Don't! Oh, don't! Please! Please!"

Marcia's hand dropped on the knob. She started to turn it. Then a hand closed on her wrist and she swung around, dragged by a strong arm. She faced Jack Grant.

"Interested?" he asked, his thin lips smiling. But there was menace in his eyes.

Marcia shrank back away from him, clasping her wrist, her face chalk white.

"I—I thought somebody was hurting your office girl. I——"

He pushed the door open. His stenographer sat at his desk, her face composed, her hands busy in a sheaf of papers. There was nobody else in the room.

"I think perhaps you made a mistake," Grant said then, coldly, each word standing by itself. "I think you imagine too many things. Don't you?"

She trembled.

"I'm sorry if I was wrong. Only I thought—I came to see you, but there was no one in the outer office and I——"

She turned suddenly and ran out of the office, down the hall. An elevator car stopped. She got in. She came to the street shaking all over, her emotions out of her control. The voice of the woman. The look in Jack Grant's eyes. The house on Superior Street. She was more afraid now than she had ever been before in her life.

Marcia could not go back to the hotel. And she ought to go to the house on Superior Street. She dreaded going back. But she had a sense of loyalty, of duty. Mittner had invested his money, so had Doris Dean, the girls were paying for lessons. She ought to be sure things were made ready. She would have to go ahead with her work. Jack Grant might be—anything. She did not know. And whoever it was who tried to kill Jerry might still be in the house. Whoever——

She started. Of course. They had gone through the house making all kinds of noise, not being careful. If someone were in the house there would be plenty of warning, plenty of time to hide. There must be hiding places in an old house like that. Closets walled up or even space between the walls. Secret passages? She remembered the stories she had read, the alarming books about murders and ghosts and all the rest. She shuddered. A vampire in the house on Superior Street? Of course not. She laughed with a sort of forced mirth, jeering at herself by way of getting back her courage.

But she would go to the Superior Street house. There might be something there. Another golden hairpin? Of course not. That woman in the office with the little girl? And what was the story of the little girl who was so desperately afraid of something? Of Grant? Marcia could understand that. Marcia, remembering how at first Grant had charmed her, how she had thought him superior in every way to Jerry, to all the others, shivered now. Yet somehow he still attracted her. The very strength of the man, his sureness, the way he locked himself up inside impenetrable walls. If he were anything but a brute—but perhaps he was not a brute. He might only be involved in some small trouble that worried him, that made him anxious. The blond woman might be

blackmailing him through some story she knew, which the office girl also knew. Marcia could not bring herself to think of Grant as evil, definitely malignant; only as brutal, harsh, fighting his battles as coldly as she would like to fight and could not.

## CHAPTER XXII

MARCIA came to the house on Superior Street, and now she laughed at herself, at all her fears. The sun was gorgeously bright, the street was alive with people walking or standing and talking, with children playing, with all the heterogeneous life of Superior Street in the afternoon. And workmen in paint-stained white overalls were going in and out of the house.

Inside all was activity. Doris Dean, in a paint-smudged smock, stood in the center of the room, debating quietly with a small spectacled man who was insisting, "But the colors, Miss Dean! Such a terrible combination! I would not recommend it at all. I think—" To which Doris answered with the arrogant calmness that was her greatest strength, "But I want it. That's all."

Men were splashing calcimine on the old walls. Other men were at work on the baseboards, painting them a bright orange.

"Orange for the woodwork, black for the walls," Doris said over her shoulder to Marcia. "And the next room all a soft green, with ivory woodwork. And the stage bright red with a black carpet. And the chairs will be orange and black."

"Isn't that rather—" Marcia paused.

"Yes. It's rather awful. But it will make a background and people will remember that."

Marcia nodded.

"And have you looked upstairs?" Hélène Goodman asked.

"No."

"Come on."

Hélène led the way. As they came to the landing, she caught Marcia's arm. "I've got something to tell you," she whispered. "Something funny!"

"What?"

"Not now. Come on in here."

She led the way into the front bedroom. Bed and vanity and chairs and carpets already were installed. It was like a room in a magazine advertisement, simple, cool, aloof.

"Like it?" Hélène asked.

"Very much." Marcia had always wanted a room like that. When she lived in three rooms over a grocery store, back home, she dreamed of a bedroom of her own, a room as simple as this. And now, living in a hotel, in the midst of catalogued grandeur, she still wanted a room that was her own. As this seemed to be. But——

"Doris says she's going to live here," Hélène whispered. "She had this room fixed up so she could occupy it. She says she's going to live on her share of the money from the school. She had a row with her people and she's leaving home."

"Oh!" Marcia considered this new problem. Doris living in the house, there all the time, interfering in everything, imposing her will on all problems, directing, deciding without any consideration? Marcia would not like that. It meant more trouble. Still, Doris had put money into the school. She had rights. And perhaps it would be a good idea. "Well?"

"I don't think you'll like that. Will you?" Hélène, her sharp face almost ratlike with anticipation, probed for information.

"Why not?"

"But she——"

"She's a partner and I'm not interested in worrying about her. It that all you had to tell me?"

"Why, yes, but I thought——"

Marcia walked away from Hélène, back into the hall. Then she said, "Have the dresses come yet?"

"Yes. And some more, too. I went over, and saw some of the people and paid them a little money—Mr. Grant gave me the money."

"Oh!"

Now, with all that activity going on, with workmen on the job, with furniture arriving, with Grant going on with the work of getting dresses, Marcia felt she must be wrong. Grant must be honest, must really be working. Then she was not being fair. Then how about Jerry? But perhaps some robber, some casual holdup man, hurt Jerry. Perhaps it had nothing to do with the house at all.

She did not like to fight big problems. She had not learned—being small, being young, being used to protection—how to face doubt. Her agile mind convinced her now that there was no problem. Only the problem of getting Jerry well. And then the school would go ahead, she would make money, they would all make money, and she would really be doing something. All right. She'd better get to work.

"Have you got a pencil and some paper? Any kind of paper?"

"Here are some drawing sheets." Hélène handed her the thick paper and a couple of stubby pencils. "Why?"

"I'm going to get busy."

Marcia sat down then at the vanity, writing. She put down, "First Lesson" at the top of a long sheet. First lesson? Poise, of course. How to forget about people. She remembered reading a long while ago about a lady

in waiting who taught the maids of honor to walk correctly by putting a heavy book on their heads, making them walk across a room without letting the book fall off. That would impress the girls. And most of them needed to learn how to walk properly. She remembered how many of them slouched, as they stood facing her . . . showing the slouch which, she knew, was so habitual with young girls. All right. She would change that. But they ought to have music.

"Hélène?"

"What is it, Marcia? I'm busy on these dresses."

"I just wondered—how about a piano?"

"Doris is bringing hers. It'll be here this afternoon."

"Who'll play it? Can you?"

"No. Wish I could. Doris can't either. But it's got a player attachment."

"That's good."

She went on with her work. First lesson: Poise, how to walk, how to walk to music, how to hold the hands out from the body; no stiff turns—none of that movie model stuff. She wrote her note that way. Second lesson: Hair, how to dress it to get the best effect; how to hold the head, how to display a costume. Third lesson: Again, how to display a costume; fitting the walk to the kind of dress, making shoulders help. Fourth lesson— She bent low over the paper. She had never before worked so steadily, so intently, in her life. And as she wrote it came to her that really she knew her job, that in a year she had learned many things so casually that they had not seemed like discoveries. She could tell those girls a lot. She could—why, she could write a book, if she wanted to. She knew enough about it.

She'd tell the girls some of the stories she knew about models, about girls who had tried to be models; the dancer who thought just because she could do acrobatic

stuff she would be a great model—but she insisted on walking like a dancer, and that made heavier, less-graceful women angry, so they would not buy the clothes; or the tall girl who spent two months working for fifteen dollars a week as a substitute model, and then came in one day and bought a thousand dollars' worth of wedding clothes—she was rich and about to be married, but she was marrying a New Yorker and she wanted to be sure she knew how to dress up to him. Stories like that. Other stories. And things about colors and how to mix them. And about make-up. Most of those girls had splotches of red high on their cheeks; make-up put on by rule of thumb with no thought of blending. And they forgot to powder the backs of their necks. And——

Her arms ached. All at once she was conscious that her back was stiff, that every muscle protested. She looked up.

It was getting dark in the room. Outside the sun was going down, and there was no sound from downstairs.

She got up quickly, ran to the door.

"Doris! Doris!"

Her voice resounded down the long hall, down the stairway. There was no answer. She ran back into the room, gathered up the sheaf of notes, ran down the stairs. The painters were gone. They had left paint buckets here and there, ladders, canvas. The place somehow seemed threatening in its emptiness. The girls were gone. Now she remembered all that she had made herself forget. This house—it sat here dark and silent and empty, waiting, waiting like a great black animal. This house——

She looked around hurriedly, found the hat she had tossed on the window seat, hurried out, slamming the door behind her, locking it.

The girls might have called her when they were about to go. They might have said they were going. But—they'd be like that, she knew.

Back at the hotel she found the clerk and the elevator boy friendly as always, subservient, and immediately her control strengthened. It was light and there were a thousand persons in the building; she did not need to be afraid. So she dressed hurriedly, not even bothering about dinner. There wasn't time. Visiting hours at the hospital were from seven-thirty to eight-thirty. She must hurry.

She asked at the desk as she left the hotel, "Any messages?" and the clerk said, "A Mr. Mittner called. Asked you to call him."

"Oh!" Not now. There wasn't time.

She hurried to the hospital and to Jerry's room. There was a new nurse on duty, a lean-faced, dour woman who did not smile at all, who sniffed audibly at Marcia's appearance, at her clothes. "I don't think you ought to bother him. He's sleeping. He needs to sleep."

"But can't I just go in and sit there? Maybe he'll wake up. If he doesn't, I won't bother him. I promise."

"Oh, all right. I guess it's all right, anyhow."

Jerry lay very still—so still that she caught her breath in a quick aching gasp. Jerry! He couldn't be—couldn't be— No. One hand stirred a little. His head moved. Relief warmed her. She sat down, then, watching him. She set herself to wishing, "Wake up, Jerry. Wake up." She resisted a great desire to touch his hand, to touch his bandaged forehead. He moved restlessly. He seemed so very tall, lying there, and yet so helpless, so much a small boy. She kept repeating in her mind. "Wake up, Jerry. Please wake up."

She could not see his eyes. The bandage covered them. But she knew he was awake now. And he said,

"Marcia!" Then again "Marcia!" with joy in the word, in his deep voice.

"Yes, Jerry. Yes."

Then for quite a time they did not say anything more. His hand moved across the coverlet, closed on her small hands, held them. They sat silent, perfectly content to be silent. Minutes passed. Marcia closed her eyes. She was so tired. And being close to Jerry she was soothed, she was relaxed, she could rest. Her head nodded.

Jerry's voice brought her back from a soft sea of blackness.

"Marcia, I missed you so much. So much."

"I missed you, too, Jerry."

"Marcia, is everything all right?"

"Of course, Jerry." She mustn't worry him. She mustn't let him think anything had happened or he'd insist on getting up, on trying to help; that would hurt him, that mustn't be. "The school is going to be wonderful," she said.

"Tell me about it. I like to hear you talk. Talk a lot, Marcia. I've been trying to hear your voice all day. Please talk."

So she talked in an eager rush of words. About the decorations. About the furniture. About Doris and Hélène. About the lessons. She told him much that she had written, explained gravely, like a school-teacher, what her notes meant.

## CHAPTER XXIII

"It sounds funny to hear you talking about your work so seriously," Jerry said to Marcia. "It just isn't right. You ought to be—I don't know—talking about little things, not about working."

"Jerry, I don't like that. I guess I can be businesslike, too. Why shouldn't I?"

"Of course you can. But I wish you didn't need to be, Marcia. You ought to have—you ought to have a house of your own and—" He stopped, and Marcia did not prompt him; she did not want him to go on. A house! She had wanted a house of her own ever since she was a little girl. A place she could worry about and work for and buy things for and feel proud of, a place to be hers. She changed the subject deftly.

"Hélène's a funny little thing."

"Why?" He followed her lead. She was grateful for that. It wouldn't do to talk about themselves. Not yet, anyhow.

She told him about Hélène, about Hélène's whispered news. She said, "I really think she hoped she could start some sort of a mix-up. She's so unimportant, and I guess she feels it, so she tries to start things. I guess it makes her feel more sure of herself."

"I know some people like that."

The conversation lapsed again. But it was not necessary to talk. It was enough to be in the same room with Jerry, to touch his hand, to know he was getting better. And it was enough for Jerry that Marcia was there,

near him, warm and honest, the hard pose forgotten, the tenseness gone from her voice. Quite enough to make him enormously happy.

"I had a telegram from my father."

"Oh?" What would his family say about her? They wouldn't like her. They'd take Jerry away from her. The thought terrified Marcia. Then she'd have a new enemy to fight. She thought of almost everyone in the world as an enemy. In that was the answer to much of her selfishness, her lack of kindness.

Jerry went on, "He said if I wanted him to he'd bring some of the boys and get the man who slugged me. But he said he imagined I could handle it myself. He said he'd deposited some money for me here if I needed it."

"You've got a nice father, haven't you, Jerry?"

"He's a good old man. He——"

For ten minutes, Jerry told her about his father and his mother. He did not know that each thing he said made her more unhappy, made her more sure than ever that she did not belong with Jerry. Her own people—she had been ashamed of them, once; she had grown past that. But the small miserly coldness of her father, the shrewish temper of her mother, their devotion to the small monotonous round of their life, their hatred of anything new or different or beautiful, set against the quality of Jerry's people, the money they had and did not think about. He told her about that money without any boasting; it was so natural to Jerry to have money that he did not think how other people might feel who had no money, who made money the only goal they knew. Facing all this, Marcia's courage weakened, she felt once more that she was outside the barrier. Jerry wasn't for her. He was for someone his people knew and liked, someone who had been through college and knew about things she only guessed at, somebody who had good

breeding and background which she only imitated. She drew her hand away.

"Marcia! You're not going? Not yet. Please."

"No, Jerry, I'm not going."

But he could feel a new note in her voice. And because she knew no other way, Marcia was fighting against him now; she had learned that he was hurt easily, it had become her credo to hurt first in self-defense; she mustn't really say anything to hurt Jerry, but she must draw away from him to save herself.

She was actually glad when the thin-faced nurse came in to say in her sharp-edged voice, "You've got to go now—time is up."

"Not yet, nurse," Jerry pleaded.

"Yes. It's 'way past visiting hours. She's got to go right away or I'll get into trouble with the floor superintendent."

"That's right, Jerry. But I'll be back to-morrow."

"You promise?"

"Of course."

She patted his hand quickly, lightly.

"Good night."

He said, "Good night, dear." He heard her sob faintly. That made him sad, but also he was happy. Then she really cared so much? Then everything was all right.

"I'll get up to-morrow," he told the nurse jubilantly. "I've got to."

"You will not."

"I'll bet you a dollar and ninety-two cents I do."

She sniffed and went away. And Jerry slept quietly, happily. But Marcia did not sleep until late in the night. She lay staring at the ceiling in her room, debating, trying to make herself happy again, trying to be reassured. It was no use. She might as well forget about Jerry Kerrigan. The others—she had been glad to be with

other boys, to dance with them, to go places with them. That had been all. But with Jerry—the thought of marriage was natural, he was so much more important to her and she could not change it. And marriage could not be possible. Jerry belonged to another world and it was no use thinking about being Mrs. Jerry Kerrigan. It would be nice. She thought how her name would look on visiting cards. "Mrs. Marcia Kerrigan." She thought how it would feel to walk into places with Jerry Kerrigan and be introduced as his wife. But she felt it could not be. Then finally, after a great many hours, she slept.

She woke early out of fitful sleep, her eyes swollen, her mind still in a turmoil. She dashed cold water on her face, bathed her eyes again and again, was finally convinced that she could not do more to take away the feeling of depression, of inadequacy, that haunted her that morning. But she could bury herself in work at the house on Superior Street. She could take her notes and work them over and over, she could argue with Doris and listen to Hélène and help place furniture. She could forget about Jerry if she worked hard enough. She hoped that would help.

It did not. She worked that morning like an automaton, without inspiration, without for a moment losing herself in what she was doing. Always the monitor in her mind was asking questions, was jeering. Always the thought of Jerry was with her. Yet somehow she got through an hour of writing down notes for the lessons, another hour of debating with Doris and Hélène about the placing of furniture—and in that hour she came perilously close to an outburst of temper. Once or twice she caught back stinging words barely in time. Then another hour passed in inspecting each corner, in agreeing dully, "It's perfect. You're right about how it looks, Doris. You've done an awfully good job."

"How about lunch?" Doris asked finally. "I'd like to treat."

"Let's go," Hélène said excitedly. Even a free meal could excite Hélène, Marcia thought. It would be nice to have desires and hopes as simple as that, to want nothing more than the pleasure of the moment.

She went along with them and ate little, said little. Doris talked, baited Hélène, drew her out into absurd declarations, inane stories of her triumphs, with a sort of mechanical cruelty. Marcia began to pity Hélène a little. But there was no point to pity. Hélène was quite happy through it all. Hélène was content to be laughed at, so long as she held the center of the stage; she would accept any affront from Doris, because to her Doris was the acme of all things polished and cultured and valuable.

So after a while it was time for Marcia to go and see Jerry. And she faced the visit with anything but happiness. She had been so eager to see Jerry last night. But now—now she felt there was a wide chasm just ahead of her which she could not cross. Now she knew she must change, must not care, must steel herself. But as she rode to the hospital she went ruthlessly about the business of telling Marcia Talent her faults. Selfishness. Of course. And—well, dishonesty. And—well, not playing the game. And— "But you have to live that way," the small monitor argued to her. "You've always had to fight for yourself. Your own family didn't understand you, and you never had things like other girls; you had to scheme for everything you got. You'll have to scheme just as hard now or you'll be in trouble again. Suppose the school fails? Suppose you don't get any money out of it? What will you do then?" She tried to still the monitor. But it was no use. The voice went on, "You've got to take care of yourself first. Nothing

else really matters. Don't you know that? Don't you?"

She went into Jerry's room telling herself still, "You've got to fight." She saw that the bandages were off his eyes, that he was propped up against pillows, gay, somehow a little pale, yet unbelievably young and gay. Her heart jumped. All that the monitor had said, all that she had thought last night, all that she felt must be true, meant nothing in this moment. All that mattered was that she was with Jerry, that he could see her, that his eyes laughed at the world and that he said, "Hello, dear. T've been so eager for you to come through that door. I almost got up and came after you."

They talked about nothing at all. Desperately, she steered him away from the thing that must not be talked about. Nervously, with a hard brilliance, she laughed about the school, about the way it looked.

"We're all ready. I'll work there a little while tomorrow morning and then the next day we open for business. And then I'll be a school-teacher."

"I'll be there Monday for the grand opening."

"No. You mustn't. I couldn't. That would bother me. I've got to be very grown-up and old and everything. Don't you come barging in and spoiling everything."

"But I want to come. I think I'd like to see the models."

"And they'd like to see you." She thought, "They're Gary Cooper fans, everyone of them. And if they saw Jerry they'd—" Jealousy? That was funny, for Marcia Talent to be jealous because of any man. But she didn't want the girls to see Jerry, she didn't want him to see them. He might see some girl among them he liked better than he liked her. He might— "You stay out of there, Jerry Kerrigan. You think I want you to turn my whole school upside down?"

They laughed together. The day nurse put her head through the door, laughed, too, and said, "Hello, kids. Nice day, isn't it?" They blushed at the intimacy of her eyes, the way she seemed to approve of them, of them as two lovers drawn together, belonging together.

"She's a peach," Jerry said. "I sent out this morning to get some candy for her. I don't imagine she gets very much. I told them to send up a ten-pound box. Do you suppose she'll like it?"

"She'll make herself sick on it."

"Well, this is a hospital, isn't it?"

Then it was time for Marcia to leave. But the nurse said as she followed Marcia out of the room, "Don't you worry. Your man will be out Monday, sure."

Her man! But he wasn't. He couldn't be. He didn't belong to her at all. But the way he looked at her, the way his eyes lighted up when she came into the room, the way his voice deepened and softened when he spoke to her— "Your man!" Marcia choked a sob in her throat.

## CHAPTER XXIV

SUNDAY morning on Michigan Avenue, from the Drake down toward the Loop, is like no other hour of the week anywhere else in Chicago. There is a sort of hush over the street, where at all other times the automobiles race past in thousands, the people mill and hurry and call back and forth and go on hurrying. There is a sort of blue haze in the air and the long shadows make the street cool, turn Michigan Avenue, somehow, almost into a shady country road. And the people are not hurrying; they are bound for church or they are going to call on someone; they wear bright clothes, they stop to talk in small compact groups, they have time now to think of friends and of places they should visit; they are not like city people, caught up in the wheel, but simply people.

All this was new to Marcia. She could not remember any other time when she had walked down Michigan Avenue at nine-thirty on Sunday morning. Sunday morning was for sleep, for sleep until the bright sun of afternoon wakened you to a round of parties that were not like parties during the week, because everyone was more rested, more gay.

Now she had work to do. She had a place to go and she had keys for this place and it was hers. She was getting ready for her classes, which would start to-morrow morning. She felt important and grown-up and busy. She liked the feeling. She ate in a small sandwich place where the sandwiches had unusual names but were the same combinations she knew so well from a hundred

other places, where breakfast was topped off with cups of free coffee, with marmalade, with much service for which you were not allowed to pay. She went on, then, down Michigan Avenue, then to Superior Street. Men were coming out, here and there, in knickers, bulky golf bags slung from their shoulders. A few children, starched and uncomfortable in their Sunday best, played quietly. There was a hush over everything.

The house was the only somber thing on the street. Even the bright curtains at the windows, put up yesterday, did not relieve the deadness of the windows. Even the small crisp sign of the door which said "Manikin," nothing more, did not relieve the forbidding leer of the small fanlight at the top of the door. She looked back. It was comfortable to know that this was Sunday morning, that people were on the street, that they were close to her. It was comforting to think about all those people being there before she unlocked the door and stepped inside.

It was hard to believe that a house could be so greatly changed so quickly and so easily. The bright orange of the woodwork against the black walls in the first big room, the shining marble of the fireplace, the small rugs on the polished floor, the shining darkness of the big piano, the brightness of the second room, of the stage—Doris Dean deserved all the credit that Doris accepted so calmly. She had worked well and with amazing efficiency. The models, coming back to this place tomorrow morning, would be startled and subdued and really ready for work. Girls could not help walking well, being poised, being smart and sophisticated, in the crisp modernity of this place. Modernity, in spite of the age of the house, its squat old Victorian dinginess. For that was hidden now by fresh paint and new shiny furniture and the whole atmosphere of Doris Dean's decora-

tions. Marcia, looking at all this, knew it was good. The school could not possibly fail, in such a setting. She must do her job as well as Doris had done hers. Or better. Better, of course. She nodded. She said aloud, "I can. I'll show her. I'll show Jack Grant, too. And—and Jerry."

She went to work. There was much work to do. She must have the whole program organized so perfectly that not a moment would be lost. She would pick out one girl at a time, one of each type, and let the others watch. Then she would put them all through drills together, not bothering about the costumes. That would come later.

She forgot herself in the glowing plans she made, in the applause she could hear already. Marcia Talent was small? Too small to be considered seriously? She came from a small town and from small people? She was not really a part of Chicago? But she was. She was important and she would prove it. She did not need Jerry. She did not need anyone.

Against her will, she found herself looking frequently at her tiny watch. Ten-thirty. Eleven-fifteen. Twelve. Twelve forty-five.

The hospital visiting hours began at one. She ought to be there. Jerry would be disappointed. She'd have to hurry.

No. She might as well begin the break now as later. She might as well let him start finding out now that whatever he had imagined or planned was wrong. She'd go on working. She'd not even go to the hospital. Right? she asked the small monitor. And "Of course that's right," the monitor answered. So she worked on. The pile of notes grew and grew under her swift fingers. Her fingers hurt, her wrist began to ache, but she kept on writing. Strike out that phrase. It didn't mean

enough. Change it like this. Or like this. Tear up that whole sheet and start over. Tear up this sheet, too, and try it again. Strike out that phrase. Put in this word.

Her watch said one-twenty. Then for twenty minutes Jerry had been waiting for her, had been worrying, had been insisting, "But she said she would come. She promised." She didn't want to break a promise to Jerry. Not yet. She shouldn't. But she ought to stay here.

She heard a car stop in front. Grant? She ran to the window. No. It was Doris Dean, getting out from behind the wheel of a long racing car. And people were with her. Two girls, two men. All in sport clothes. All laughing and shouting at once. They were all coming in.

"Here we are!" Doris said as she opened the door. "Here's my shop. Not bad, is it?"

Then she saw Marcia.

"Oh! Hello. Hello, Marcia. How do you happen to be here to-day?"

"Work to do," Marcia said briefly, almost sullenly.

"People, this is Marcia Talent. She—works here."

The negligence with which she spoke said plainly, "She's just one of the hired people. You don't need to bother about her." And the people with Doris took it in that way. They said with no interest, "How do you do?" One of the girls added, "You're one of the models, aren't you?"

"I teach the models."

"That's nice."

Doris led them on into the next room, began explaining about the stage, about the stairway. "Come on upstairs and see my room."

"You're not going to live here, in a place like this?"

"Yes. Why not? I think I'd enjoy it for a while.

And my people need a little treatment. Absent treatment."

They laughed and went with her up the stairs. Marcia, her cheeks flaming, watched them go. And these were people like the people Jerry belonged with! If she were Mrs. Jerry Kerrigan, people like these would look at her vaguely, look away, make it obvious without words that she did not matter, that she was not one of their group and could not be! So then— So then, what the monitor said was right. So then, there was no use going to see Jerry. He wouldn't really care. He'd miss her a little but not very much. She— The telephone, newly installed, met her eyes. She got up and picked up the receiver and called Mittner's number.

"Hello? Jim? This is Marcia."

"Marcia? Say, I haven't heard from you for days. What you been doing with yourself, anyhow?"

"I've been busy, Jim. Getting things moved in and getting ready to start the school."

"Sure. I know. When am I going to see you?"

"This afternoon, if you want to."

"How quick?"

"Right away, if you want to. I'll meet you at Michigan and Superior. Can we go somewhere for a drive?"

"You bet we can. We sure can. I'll be there right away."

She left the house without looking back, left the sheaf of notes she had been so proud of scattered carelessly on the desk. She went to meet Mittner, and when she saw his round face beaming like a red moon from his car she was honestly glad. She felt that he was an old friend and that it was good to be with him again. And she said, "Drive a long way. I don't care where. I just want to get out of town for a while."

They went north. On past Evanston. On up the north

shore. They drove for hours and the open country was good to see. Marcia closed her eyes and let the cool breeze strike her face; she did not talk at all.

"You don't seem very chipper to-day," Mittner volunteered once.

"I'm not," she answered briefly.

So they rode on until they saw a small white farmhouse set back from the road, a big sign at the gate announcing, "Best Chicken Dinners."

"Hungry?" Mittner asked.

She was. She had forgotten about it, but she was hungry.

"Yes. Let's stop here."

The place was really a farmhouse. There were only two tables, big old-fashioned tables, covered with red-and-white checked tablecloths. The silver was the kind that comes in "sets," the dishes were heavy but spotlessly clean. The little woman who brought in the food was white-haired, round-faced. She looked content with life, untroubled, her eyes were clear. She called to some man in another room, "John, your dinner's ready. On the kitchen table. Hurry up, honey." She said, "I hope you folks like the chicken. There's more if you want it." Then she disappeared.

Mittner ate noisily, with gusto, picking up a chicken leg, chewing on it earnestly, pouring great spoonfuls of thick gravy over the mound of mashed potatoes he had shaped carefully at one side of his plate, reaching clear across the table for more bread, talking in short grunts between mouthfuls of food.

"Swell chicken?" Then in a moment, "That old woman sure can cook." Then in a moment, "Like it all right?"

"Yes." And she was really hungry, she wanted to eat, but somehow she could not. She took a small bite of chicken, then forgot the food. She was thinking about

Jerry. The small monitor could not help her. She was thinking about Jerry, back there in Chicago in a hospital bed, waiting for her, wondering why she had not come. She had not been fair. Jerry could not know how she felt, why she was running away from him. He couldn't feel anything but that she had failed him. And he trusted her. He depended on her. She didn't have a right to hurt him. She had no rights at all. He was not a responsibility, she owed him no duty. But the nurse had said, "Your man!" And the phrase sounded in her mind again and again. "Your man!"

"What's bothering you, anyhow?" Mittner demanded suddenly, putting down a stripped chicken bone, staring at her.

"Nothing at all."

"But you don't seem like yourself. Listen here—You're not worrying about that fool school, are you?"

"A little."

"But that's silly. That school doesn't mean anything to you, really."

"Yes, it does."

"But why? Teaching a lot of fool girls how to walk around a room. What's that, anyhow?"

Her eyes flashed dangerously.

"It's a job for me. It's the first real managing job I ever had—the first time I ever had a chance to do anything original. I like it. I'm proud of that school, and I don't think it's funny at all."

Concern flooded his face.

"I didn't mean to make you mad, Marcia. But listen, why don't you just quit working?"

"What do you mean?"

Slowly, he wiped his hand and his lips with the big red napkin. He leaned forward, his elbows on the table. His face softened. Marcia—because she had learned so

much in a few days—understood him now. She felt vastly sorry for him. She remembered how he looked that night after she had fainted. She remembered how many times he had been kind to her in his fumbling, crude, touching way.

"Marcia?"

"Yes, Jim."

"Could I ask you something? You wouldn't get mad?"

"No, Jim. What is it?"

"Marcia—" Red rose on his face, turned his face a brilliant scarlet. "Marcia— It's funny, an old man like me talking like this. But would you marry me? Would you marry me right now and let me take care of you? Would you?"

She sat back in her chair.

"You're asking me to——"

"To marry me. Listen, Marcia. I've been wanting to ask you for a long time. I know I'm— Well, I'm not handsome or young and I'm fat and I know how you feel about me, but that doesn't matter. I don't ask you to be crazy about me or anything. I just—Marcia, I'm lonesome. I'm an old man and I haven't got anybody and I—Marcia, won't you marry me?"

He was not funny. He had always been funny before, but Marcia Talent could not laugh at Jim Mittner now. He sat there with his hand out across the table—his old pudgy hands, old hands, hands that had made money but had never earned him any happiness. His small eyes pleaded like the eyes of an old dog. His face was contorted with his earnestness.

## CHAPTER XXV

MARCIA put her hands on one of Mittner's hands. She patted his hand.

"Jim?"

"Yes. Marcia."

"I can't marry you. I——"

"But Marcia. Please——"

"Listen to me, Jim. I want to tell you some things. I want to tell you about me."

"You don't have to tell me anything. I know all about you. I know I want you to marry me so I can take care of you and you don't have to worry any more. That's all. Marcia—" there was a terrible sort of pathos in his thick voice, "look. I won't ever bother you at all. But I've got money, Marcia. Lots of money. You could have everything you wanted. Everything. I just——"

She shook her head.

"I can't marry you, Jim. I'm—not very honest. But I wouldn't—I wouldn't cheat you. I'm all through cheating, Jim."

"You shouldn't say that. Please."

She did not even seem to hear him. Slowly, in detached words, as though she were reciting a lesson, she said, "I'm no wife for you or anybody, Jim Mittner. I'm selfish. I can't help it. I never had anything in my life. I've always taken what I could get, schemed to get it. I've hurt a lot of people when I shouldn't. I let you spend money on me and I knew I was just as bad as

any gold-digger ever was. And I let you put your money into that school. And—" There were tears in her eyes. "Jim, you're too good a man for Marcia Talent. That's all there is to it."

She got up from the table.

"Let's go," she said quietly. "Let's not talk about it any more, please."

He studied her. His eyer were suffering but the little fat man forced a smile. He was a good loser, Marcia thought. He had strength back of his funny fat face; he had courage and decency.

"All right, Marcia. I won't say anything more. But if you change your mind, any time, any time at all; if you think different, I'll be waiting. I'll always be waiting, Marcia."

Then they went back to Chicago. They approached the city in the darkness. They moved slowly, crawling with the returning Sunday drivers. It seemed to Marcia that they would never be back on Michigan Avenue again. She closed her eyes, tried to forget the time, tried to forget Mittner's face when he had asked her to marry him. Tried most of all to forget Jerry. Jerry, waiting at the hospital. Wondering. "I love him," she told the monitor. "No use your saying anything. I love him. I can't let him find it out, but I love him and that's all there is to it."

"Will you take me to my hotel, please?"

"Sure will, Marcia. You bet."

They were there at last. He opened the door, helped her out, stood with an odd dignity, his fat face impassive now, his eyes sad.

"Thank you for going with me, Marcia. Thanks for letting me talk. And, Marcia, don't forget. If you change your mind——"

She put out her hand.

"I don't think anybody ever paid me a greater compliment than you paid me to-day, Jim," she said, fighting against a desire to cry, to cry wildly. "Thank you. And I won't forget."

He said good-by and got back into the car and drove away. And Marcia hurried to her room, to dress, to cry a little, to hurry out again. She told the taxi driver, "Henrotin Hospital. Hurry."

They said at the desk, "Pretty late, miss. You'll have to hurry."

"I'll only be a minute."

Then she was in Jerry's room. He was reading. He did not hear the door open. He was reading a magazine, his bandaged head bent forward under the small bed lamp.

"Jerry!"

The magazine dropped out of his lean hands, he turned, he held out his arms.

"Marcia! Oh, I'm glad you came. I thought—I don't know what I thought. But it's been so long since you were here."

"I know, Jerry."

She did not take his hands. She did not dare to touch them. If she felt his hands holding hers, she would forget everything, she would weaken again, she would fail to carry the thing through that she was planning.

"I can only stay a minute," she said.

"Why? Why can't you stay a long while?"

"I've got an engagement."

"Oh!" His eyes flinched. "Sorry, Marcia."

Then they felt stiff with each other, they found it hard to say anything at all. A wall had come between them, and Jerry Kerrigan did not know why but he felt that Marcia was a thousand miles away from him.

"Did you have a nice day?" he asked finally.

"Yes. I worked a long while. Then I went for a drive this afternoon with Mr. Mittner. You remember, I told you about him."

"Oh, the old man you used to know?"

"Yes."

He said, "The old man you used to know." He had the same intolerance of age that she herself felt. He could not consider Mittner as a rival; she thought of him only with a sort of pity, as a man who did not know his day was past. Already, he had forgotten Mittner's existence.

"Marcia," he said, "I'm glad you came. I wrote to my father about you to-night. I told him all about you. I want you to know him. He'll be here soon, too. And I want——"

"I'd be glad to know him," she said coldly, distantly. "But I'm afraid I won't be able to meet him."

"Why not?"

He was leaning forward now, he was driving her into a corner, his eyes were hurting her, she would break down in a minute and if she did not hide her feelings quickly he would find out that she loved him, she would fail in what she must do.

"Because I'm going to be married," she said. "I'm going to marry Mr. Mittner. Next week."

After that there was a moment of waiting. Marcia waited for Jerry Kerrigan to say something, to argue, to beg her to retract what she had said about marrying Mittner. And Jerry waited for her to say, "It isn't true. I was just joking." He had never said to her, "I love you"; she had never said anything like that to him. But he had thought it was a thing that did not need to be said; he had thought, watching her, listening to her voice, that each thing she said was actually a declaration of her love. Now he thought that she had not

cared at all, that she had been pleasant to him as a girl is pleasant to any man who has done some small favor for her; that the tall castle of dreams he had built up out of half phrases and intonations and long pauses was nothing at all, was evanescent, unreal.

He was not the kind of man Marcia Talent knew. He could not beg her for anything, he could not—because he had no sort of conceit—tell himself, "She doesn't mean it," and then set about inducing her to deny what she had said.

He asked finally, through taut lips, "You really mean that?"

"Of course. I'm going to marry Mr. Mittner."

"I see."

There was a long silence. His eyes were turned away, there was no expression on his face. His mouth was drawn tightly, his jaw was a rocky crag.

Marcia searched his face, but she found nothing to help her, nothing to stay her heart. So she got up.

"I think I'd better be going," she said. "You'll be all right, won't you?"

"Of course," he said, without turning to look at her. His voice was empty of all feeling; it was simply a voice saying words without any inflection.

"I can't get anything for you?"

"No. Nothing."

She said to herself, "But I can't leave him like this. I've stabbed him. He was counting on me. He believed we belonged together. I can't tell him the truth. He wouldn't understand. He'd say his people and the rest didn't matter. And then I would hurt him if I married him. I must be right in what I am doing. There isn't any other way out. I must be right."

She paused near the door.

"Jerry——"

He did not turn.

"Jerry——"

He did not speak.

"Good-by, Jerry. You've been—very wonderful."

He did not look at her. So she went out, closing the door softly. She kept her head down so the nurse could not see her face, for in spite of herself there were tears in her eyes. She was leaving Jerry. He had not even said "good-by" and she would never see him again. She realized now that nothing had ever mattered as much as did the fact that she had closed the door and in so doing had ended everything that mattered.

There was the school. She could work hard. She could teach the girls and earn money and be independent of everyone. Somehow if she should work hard enough and for enough hours each day she might not think so much about Jerry, she might not miss him so terribly.

He had never held her in his arms for a moment. She had never told him anything of what she felt about him and he had never said, "I love you." A dozen men had said to her, "I love you" and some of them must have meant the words, but they had never mattered. And now the memory of kindness, of a wild speedboat ride on Lake Michigan, of certain brief moments, of certain meaningless phrases—no more than that.

It was all she could do to speak the name of her hotel to the taxi driver. She fought down a wild wish to cry to him, "Stop, I want to get out." She made herself correct with powder and rouge and lipstick, she dabbed her eyes carefully, for she must not go into the hotel looking troubled or sad. She must keep up her guard and be what they expected Marcia Talent to be.

She thought suddenly about Norene McCann. Norene, who loved Gordon Wales for a long time but did not speak because Gordon thought he loved Marcia. She

had always thought Norene was silly and weak to stand back, to let the man she loved go to someone else, to let anything stand in the way of her love. But she understood better now.

She could go and see Norene. That would help. Norene would be cool and certain about life and content, and from Norene's contentment Marcia might take courage and strength.

It would be nice to see Norene. It would be nice to see Gordon. Simple people, both of them, who found the road they wanted to travel and were happy.

Or were they? Might something have happened to separate them, to ruin their happiness? She felt conscience-stricken. She had not heard from them in months, she had made no effort to keep in touch with them, she had felt that she wanted to forget them. She was not even sure of their address.

Going through the telephone book in her hotel room, she found the name, Gordon Wales, the number, the address. She called.

"Hello?"

She would know Norene's voice anywhere. Correct but in no way precise, simple, unaffected—like Norene herself.

"Norene, this is Marcia. Marcia Talent."

She waited. She was not sure that Norene would not hang up. But she did nothing like that.

"Marcia! Oh, child, I'm so glad to hear from you. So glad!"

She was. There was a warm friendliness in her voice that Marcia needed to hear, that was balm to her sick courage.

"Just thought I'd call you up and see how you and Gordon were getting along," Marcia said, forcing casualness into her words.

"Beautifully, Marcia. I'm awfully happy. But why haven't you been out to see us?"

"Why—" She sought a plausible reason. Finally she said with a transparent vagueness, "I've been awfully busy, Norene. You know I lost all the money I'd saved up when the shop failed—when Kaspar ran away."

"I hadn't heard about it. Was it in the papers?"

"Yes. A lot of stuff."

"You see, I don't get much time to read the papers. We— Well, we're expecting a baby pretty soon now."

"Norene! Oh, I'm so glad. I think that's marvelous."

They talked about babies, about everything under the sun. Twice the operator cut in to say "five minutes," but they went on. And somehow the voice over the telephone brought a sort of peace to Marcia, the steady courage of Norene in the face of much greater problems than her own made Marcia braver. She said good-by at last with real reluctance and she promised, "I'll come out some night next week," and really meant it.

## CHAPTER XXVI

MARCIA did not want to be alone or to think. But there was nothing else to do. She did not want to call Mittner. She did not want to face that necessity yet; to-morrow would be time enough, plenty of time. Yet she could not bear to sit quietly in her room any longer; she did not want to be quiet.

It was not so very late. It was only midnight.

She chose a heavy polo coat and a small felt hat, and went out of the hotel.

"Pretty late to be going for a walk, Miss Talent," the night clerk volunteered.

"I won't be out long," she said. "Just going for a walk."

She walked aimlessly down Michigan Avenue. A window filled with ancient furniture from England held her a moment. A window filled with marvelous small things in jade and crystal and ebony and ivory and rose quartz, from China and Japan, held her again. Dresses in certain windows, bags and jewelry and shoes in others. So many things that she would like to own, that would be right for her, that she could not have. People who passed stared at her curiously. Once a furtive young man spoke tentatively:

"Hello, kid."

She did not even hear him. She walked on, and she thought about Jerry. No use trying to forget him. No use trying to forget the way he looked when she was leaving the room. No use trying to think about anything else.

Chicago Avenue. The old water tower was so much like a feudal castle, like a place of dull dungeons and unknown passages, with ghosts walking through echoing halls. Funny, to think that it was no more than the shell for an old standpipe to hold water.

Superior Street. She looked into a shop window at things from Czechoslovakia and Russia and France, smocks and dresses covered with exquisite hand-worked embroidery, bags, odd necklaces. She started on. Then she turned east on Superior Street. The old house drew her. She did not even think of where she was going. She passed a policeman idling on a corner under the lamp-post, peering at a newspaper. She stopped at the foot of the steps.

She looked up. The windows were closed eyes with secrets back of them that could not be discovered. The house was asleep with the dull sleep of the aged. The house——

Faintly, through blinds that covered the third-floor windows, she saw a steady beam of light.

A light in the house at that hour? A light left by Doris and her friends from the afternoon? But it couldn't be that. Then what?

She looked back. The policeman still stood under the light. She began to run toward him, her heels clicking loudly in the empty stillness of the street.

"Officer! Officer!"

He dropped his paper, came hurrying to meet her.

"What is it, lady?"

"The house—back there—" In tumbled sentences she told him who she was, told him about the school, said, "There's a light burning there. And there shouldn't be. I'm afraid to go in alone to see what's wrong. Will you go with me?"

"Sure thing. But what's wrong there?"

"Probably nothing. I'm just—worried."

"All right, miss. Let's go."

He went up the steps first. Marcia held back, trembling. But she was being silly. There wasn't really anything in the house. There couldn't be. She braced her courage. She stood close behind the policeman, handed him her keys, and he unlocked the door. They stepped into a soft blackness. Her hand groped along the wall for the light switch. She pressed it. Nothing happened. She pressed it again, again. The lights did not come on. But there was a light upstairs. Then what——

"The lights won't work," she breathed, whispering in spite of herself—and it sounded in her ears as though she shouted.

"Were they all right when you were here to-day?"

"I think so."

"But you said you saw a light burning."

"I did. On the third floor."

"Oh. Well, maybe you better go on outside. I'll go up alone. Might not be anything, but there's no use of your getting into a mix-up if there is one."

She said stubbornly, "No. I'm going along. This is my school. If there's anything wrong I want to know about it."

She had failed Jerry. She had been a coward about him. But she wouldn't be a coward now.

The policeman took a match box out of his pocket, struck a match, and the flickering small light cut an irregular hole in the gloom.

"Ought to have a flashlight along," he said. "Broke mine early in the evening. Well, come on, lady."

They moved up the stairs then by slow stages, stopping whenever the match flame burned low. They moved almost silently. They heard nothing at all. But it seemed

to Marcia that the darkness itself shouted at them, mocked them.

"Stop here," she said suddenly. "This is Doris Dean's room."

The door was ajar. They stepped inside. The policeman tried the switch beside the door, but it did not respond. The lights were dead.

"There's a candle on the dresser," Marcia said. "Here."

He found it, lit it, and now the darkness receded, the faint light spread. They stood beside Doris Dean's bed. And Marcia saw that Doris had slept here. The covers were tumbled; there was in the silk pillow the deep dent of a head. The dress Doris wore that day lay beside the bed, tossed carelessly across a chair.

Then she saw something else, and the breath rattled in her throat; she could not make any sound at all for a moment.

On the floor beside the bed was a golden hairpin. A hairpin like the one she found. Another hairpin belonging to the blond woman!

She gasped, "Quick! Quick! I know somebody has been here. Follow me."

She forgot fear now. She seized the lighted candle and ran headlong through the door, up the stairs to the third floor, the policeman's heavy footsteps pounding close behind her. And as she neared the top she saw a pool of light ahead. Light that came through the door from the room where they had found the machine gun!

The policeman leaped past her, his gun out and glinting in the light, into the room. His wide shoulders blocked the door. Then he was inside and Marcia followed him, the blood roaring in her ears.

There was no one in the room.

There was, on a box, a candle, guttering, nearly burned

out. It was set in a saucer—in a saucer, Marcia remembered, from the set Doris had installed in the kitchen. There was nothing else in the room.

"Well?" the policeman got out, between gasps for breath.

"We've got to search the house. Something has happened. Something terrible. There wasn't any candle here—this is one from the kitchen. And Doris—she's been here and now she's gone. And the hairpin—" In racing words Marcia told the policeman about the hairpin, about the machine gun she had seen in that same room, about the blond woman, about Jack Grant.

"Grant?" The policeman stiffened suddenly. "What's he got to do with this? Huh?"

She stepped back.

"I wasn't supposed to tell," she began.

"Well, you'd better tell me, quick. You know who Jack Grant is?"

"No. He's—a broker, isn't he?"

The policeman emitted a barking laugh.

"A broker? He's one of the toughest racketeers in town. We haven't been able to get anything on him, but if he's mixed up in this there's something wrong somewhere. And you say he——"

"He started the school, yes. He got Doris to put in some money and he got some from Mr. James Mittner. And I was to run it. He——"

From somewhere out of the darkness they heard a faint, sobbing cry.

They stood like statues.

They heard the sobbing cry again, fainter, from somewhere below stairs.

Then with one accord the policeman and Marcia turned toward the door, ran down the stairs, plunging into the darkness. The candle guttered out and they

did not stop to light it. They ran through blackness, slipping, turning at the stair landings. Marcia missed a step, plunged forward, crashed against the policeman's bulk and he staggered headlong, struck the wall at the turn. They did not speak. They ran on again.

From out of the darkness the cry bubbled once more. Then everything was still and their hurrying footsteps were like the crash of guns in the stillness.

They were on the first floor, in the center room. Now the policeman stopped, fumbled for his match box, lit the candle again, held it high over his head.

There was nothing in the room.

"What's out there?" he demanded, breathless.

"The kitchen. And the door to the basement."

He plunged through the door into the kitchen. And Marcia saw that the door to the basement stood open. She held back. There might be anything in the world down there. There might be death, destruction—anything at all. But she dared not stand alone. She must follow.

The policeman went down the steps slowly, his candle throwing long, flickering beams against the tall pillars, the emptiness of the basement. He cried out suddenly, "Who's there? Who's there?"

There was no answer.

He ran toward a black box set against one of the pillars—the electric light switch box. He worked for a moment. Then blazing light sprang from all the bulbs.

"Somebody pulled the switch, that's all," he said. He went slowly now, his gun ready. But nothing moved. In the basement there was no one, nothing.

Then Marcia cried out suddenly.

On the floor, halfway between the furnace and the left wall of the basement, she saw a bedroom slipper, a fluffy thing—one of the mules Doris had brought with

her, blue and gray and Parisian, which she had shown to Marcia two days ago.

"Doris has been here!"

"That so? Then where is she now?"

She was nowhere in the basement. She was nowhere in the house. And, although the policeman called other policemen, although they searched every corner of the old house from top to bottom, although they questioned Marcia again and again, until she was a quivering thing, unnerved, with fright and fatigue, they found no trace of Doris Dean. Nor of anyone else.

"The first thing is to bring Jack Grant down here," the detectives said to Marcia. "Didn't you think he was up to something funny when he started this place?"

"No. He was very kind. I needed a job and Jack and Mr. Mittner——"

"Mittner mixed up in this? Not Jim Mittner, the broker?"

"Mr. Mittner is a very good friend of mine."

"Oh?" The detective grinned knowingly. Marcia flushed.

"He asked me to marry him," she said quietly. "And I have accepted."

"I see. Eddie, call up Jim Mittner. Better try his house first."

"O.K."

They went on questioning Marcia.

"You say this Dean girl insisted on living here? Why?"

"She'd had some sort of trouble with her family. I guess they didn't want her to go into the school in the first place and she insisted on doing it anyhow, so they were angry. She said she was going to live here a while and—'let them get over it,' was the way she put it."

"Any chance she was mixed up in anything?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, a girl doesn't disappear unless there's some good reason for it."

"But I don't believe she disappeared of her own free will. She was kidnaped."

"How? And what for?"

Marcia could not answer that. Nor could anyone else. The detectives went on with their search of the house, rapping panels, investigating the stair wells, checking every foot of the basement.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THEN Doris Dean's family appeared. Her father, tall and white-haired, and shaken with terror, blaming everyone, scorning Marcia, his eyes flashing. Her mother, a small quiet woman, who burst out suddenly at Marcia, "It's your fault. You started it. You got her into this and now you know where she is."

"But I don't, Mrs. Hartley. I had nothing to do with Doris going into the school. She talked to Mr. Grant about it. I didn't even know her until after she'd put in her money and came here to start work."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe anything you say. You're just a part of the whole scheme. You wanted to get money out of our daughter and you——"

Marcia looked appealingly at the detectives. The man who seemed to be the senior officer interposed.

"That's not really fair, Mrs. Hartley. This girl lost everything she had, too. She's the one who found out your daughter was gone."

"But how did she happen to be down here in the first place? At this time of night?"

"I've been worried about the house for days. I couldn't sleep. I left my hotel to go for a walk and I found I had come here. Then I saw a light and I called a policeman."

The woman sneered. Then she began to cry. And Marcia was not able to feel angry at those people. They looked on her as something beneath them, they had lost their daughter and in their anguish they would blame

anyone, but she could not hate them for their anger; she knew how she would feel.

She asked the detectives, "What should I do now?"

"Wait here."

So she sat in a corner of the room while the detectives went here and there, trampling over the gay rugs that had been planned for the school, moving the gay chairs that Doris had designed, even inspecting the piano Doris had given to the school. Finally there was a commotion at the door.

"Where is she? I want to see her right away!"

Jim Mittner burst into the room, his small body tense, his face sharp with anxiety.

"Marcia! What are they trying to do to you? Marcia!"

He dropped on his fat knees beside her chair, his arm thrown around the back of the chair. He was grotesque. No, he was not. There was so much sincerity in the little man that no one could have laughed at him. He glared up at the detectives.

"What's this all about, anyhow? I got down here as quick as I could. What's the trouble?"

They were respectful to Jim Mittner. He was only a fat man who wanted to marry her, and Marcia had never thought much beyond that, but now she realized that in men's affairs and in the city Jim Mittner was a man to be spoken to with much courtesy.

The senior detective explained, told the story, told of the first search and of what had happened since.

"Where's Grant?" Mittner demanded. "Got him yet?"

"No. Grant can't be found. He hasn't been in that office of his since yesterday and they say at his hotel they haven't seen him at all in the last twenty-four hours. Can you tell us anything about him?"

"I handled some brokerage accounts for him a while

ago. That's all. He got to know me and he used to sit around my office quite a little. I don't know anything about him except what I've seen in the papers."

"Then how'd you happen to put a thousand bucks into this models' school business without knowing anything about Grant?"

"I—" Mittner blushed. Then he got it out. "I put up the money because I wanted to help Miss Talent get started in business."

"Oh!" There was a world of cynicism in that single word as the detective said it. "And then you haven't watched the school much, have you?"

"I haven't seen Miss Talent since the plan was arranged until to-day. I didn't know how bad things were. You didn't tell me, Marcia."

"I couldn't. I didn't want to worry you." She patted his thick arm timidly. "I'm sorry about your money, Jim. It was my fault."

He laughed.

"You think that a thousand dollars makes any difference? Don't you even think of it again. That's a good investment if it showed up Jack Grant. You"—he hesitated, then went on in a low voice so the detectives could not hear—"you were pretty much taken up with Grant at first, weren't you?"

She had to be honest. She would not evade Jim Mittner any more.

"Yes," she said bravely. "He was different."

"Different from me. I know. He was a good-looking man, wasn't he?"

So easy to hurt Jim Mittner, she thought. He was so conscious of his tubbiness, of the way he looked.

"It wasn't that. He was hard and cold and I thought he must be a very strong man and I was interested. And then I heard him talk to his office girl one day. A little

girl named—I think I heard him call her Miss Helquist."

"Helquist?"

The senior detective stood over them, his face intent.

"You said something about Helquist?"

"Yes. I was talking about Mr. Grant's office girl. I think that was her name."

The detective turned to the others.

"Grant had the Helquist girl working in his office. Sven Helquist's daughter. You remember her. She was in court with him."

"Sure," one of the detectives said. "But he's been—say, he only broke jail about a month ago. Do you suppose he——"

"What's this about Helquist?" Mittner suddenly demanded.

"You ought to remember it, Mr. Mittner. He killed two guys in a booze scrap about a year ago. There was a lot of stuff about it in the papers. He claimed somebody framed him. Jack Grant wasn't mixed up in it at all. That's what's funny. Helquist broke jail about a month ago and there's a reward for him, but there hasn't been a trace. If his girl was working for Grant——"

"That's it!" Marcia said suddenly. "I understand it all now."

"What?"

She told them of the conversation she heard through the door of Grant's office, of the little girl's sobs, of her cry, "I want to get out of this. I want to quit!" And of the other woman's voice.

"You say she was a tall blonde?"

"Yes. Not a real blonde—though. She's done a lot of things to her hair. She wore gold hairpins. I told you. There was one of them alongside Doris Dean's bed. And I found one here once before. I saw Mr.

Grant with her a couple of times at the club I told you about. And——"

"Get busy on that," the senior detective snapped. "A tall blonde tied up with Jack Grant's mob. That might give us something. I think that's all for to-night, Miss Talent. You better go to your hotel and go to bed. You want us to send a man along?"

"No," Mittner said. "I'll take care of Miss Talent. Thanks, boys." He handed long black cigars to several of the detectives, spread his hands humorously to show the others he had no more. "Good night."

It was gray dawn outside. A milk wagon rattled clumsily along the street. A workman, whistling, walked past the house, stared at the detectives, at Marcia and Mittner and the Hartleys, hurried on.

Mrs. Hartley caught Marcia's arm then.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I know I was wrong about you, but I—I couldn't help it. I—oh, Doris! Doris!"

Marcia said, "I know how you feel, Mrs. Hartley. But don't you worry. We'll find her all right."

"Here we are," Mittner said. They got into his car and drove toward Michigan Avenue. He looked like a small Gibraltar at the wheel of his car: sturdy, stocky, dependable. Marcia felt a sudden wave of gratitude to him. He took things so calmly, he did not blame her for anything. Of course not. He loved her. He had asked her to marry him. He loved her enough for that and so nothing she did, no trouble she caused him, could make him forget about loving her. A month ago she could have laughed at that and the small monitor in her would have applauded, would have sneered at a fat man in love. But she understood so much more now. Loving Jerry Kerrigan, having lost him forever, she understood so well that the knowledge stabbed her heart.

"Jim."

"Yes, Marcia." His voice was gentle. "What is it?"

"Jim, I want to tell you—I—oh, you've been wonderful to me. You deserve somebody fine, Jim. You ought to—you——"

"Never mind, Marcia." He was silent for a moment. Then, "Marcia. The detectives said you told them you were going to marry me. Was that right?"

"I—" Jerry! Oh, Jerry! She squared her shoulders, forced a smile. "That's what I said, Jim. You asked me, you know. Or maybe now you'd rather not have me remember what you said—now that everything is——"

"I'm glad you told them, Marcia. You really meant it?"

"I did, Jim. Oh, but not now. Not now! Jim—I've caused all this trouble. But I've got to be fair with you, Jim. I want to be honest. I've made such a muddle of things. And I won't lie to you, Jim. I don't love you."

"I know." His eyes were miserable but his voice was calm. "I know that, Marcia. Tell me. You weren't —weren't in love with Jack Grant?"

"No. No, Jim. Never. I swear I wasn't."

"But there's someone else, isn't there?"

"I—Jim, I've got to be honest, I've got to be. There is someone else. But I'll never see him again, Jim; I'll never think about him. That's all over, I know it's all over. You see I can't give you much. But I'll be square, Jim. I promise that. If you want to marry me knowing all about me—how weak I am and everything —I'll marry you, Jim."

"Then we'll be married to-morrow," he said gently. "And the rest—doesn't matter at all."

"No. Not to-morrow!" Panic was in her voice.

"Why not, Marcia?"

"I won't marry you until all this is settled, Jim. We've got to find Doris and get everything straightened out. Grant got money out of all those girls, Jim. They'll be coming for their lessons and I'll have to go through with it. I——"

"How about money?"

"We've got enough," she lied.

"We?"

"Hélène and I. We've got enough to keep going until something happens."

"But I'd like to——"

"No. I won't take any more money from you, Jim."

So they came to her hotel. It was almost broad daylight, now. A porter looked at them with casual curiosity, then went on polishing the brass bars across the hotel windows. The sleepy clerk rouse, said, "Oh, good morning, Miss Talent," stared at Mittner.

"When do I see you, Marcia?"

He had not called her "dear." He was standing away from her. He was being kind in every way that he knew, giving her all the courtesy he could, letting her find her own way. She knew now that Jim Mittner was a real man and she knew that she did not deserve his love. But—but she would go through with it. Because of Jerry. Because of—everything. Maybe she could help Mittner be happy. That would be something. She had never tried to make anybody happy in her life except now and then on a sudden impulse, as when she helped the stranded workers in the shop. Perhaps she could go through with this gallantly. She must. She must forget Jerry——

"I'll call you up, Jim. Don't come to see me at the school for a few days. Please."

"All right, Marcia. Good night."

He held her hand awkwardly, turned away, went out of the door—a stumpy little figure, broad and pudgy, no figure of romance at all, no white knight on a charger. But Marcia felt he was as much a hero as any man she had ever known in her life.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

MARCIA turned back to the clerk. "How much is my bill now?" He moved sleepily around the ledgers, made cabalistic designs on a card, announced the total. "Sixty-seven dollars and fifty cents."

With the money she had saved out of what Mittner and Grant gave her, with the money Grant had turned over a few days before for "expense," she had still almost one hundred dollars. She paid the bill.

"I'm checking out in the morning," she said.

"That's too bad, Miss Talent. We——"

"Good night," she told him.

She went to her room and for half an hour she lay on the bed, fighting for quiet nerves, letting her taut muscles relax. Then she bathed, began to pack. At seven-fifteen Marcia Talent left the big hotel where she had lived so long, and in a taxi rode back to the house on Superior Street. A policeman stood at the door.

"Hello Miss Talent. You back already?"

"Yes. I'm moving in."

"You're not! You don't mean you're going to——"

"I'm going to live here and run this school and try to find Doris Dean. That's what I've got to do."

He let her pass and she carried her heavy bags slowly up the stairs to the room where Doris had slept. She put her dresses in the closet, alongside the dresses Doris Dean had brought, which Doris might never wear again.

Then she went back downstairs, straightened rugs, rearranged the chairs, got out the sheaf of notes, and prepared for the hardest day of her life.

The first girl appeared at eight-twenty-five. She carried a newspaper in one hand, and she studied the newspaper, looked at the house, shook her head, studied the newspaper again, came hesitatingly past the large policeman who stood immovable at the door; said, "Oh, Miss Talent. You're here, then? But I thought maybe——"

"Maybe we wouldn't start?"

"Well, yes. You see the paper has a lot about Miss Dean being missing and it says some man disappeared and I wondered——"

"The school will go on just the same. Better put your coat and hat upstairs, in the second room."

The girl went upstairs slowly, still hesitant. But in a moment she returned, and as she walked into the room two other girls entered, arm in arm laughing. They had not seen the newspapers, Marcia could tell. They regarded the policeman curiously.

"Put your hats and coats upstairs," Marcia said again.

So the first half hour passed. At the end of that time there were twenty-six girls in the house waiting for the first lesson. The others, Marcia thought, probably would not come. She asked one of the girls finally, "You paid your lesson money?"

"Not yet. I've got a check for forty dollars for the first part of it. Can I give the check to you?"

So here was a new idea. Grant hadn't been after the small sum he could have stolen—the lesson money. It was something else. And if the girls had not turned in their money to him, then there was money to keep her going, to keep the school going. It was a stroke of fortune—something she had not expected at all. Her eyes glinted.

"All of you," she called loudly, "all of you! Have you paid your lesson costs?"

Five had. They had sent checks to Grant's office.

Marcia told them, "All right." Then she told the others, "I'll take the payments now." So they filed past her desk. One wistful small person had only twenty dollars —"I saved that, but my mother is going to get the rest from my father if you'll please let me start in with this much." Marcia said kindly, "Of course." Poor little thing! Not a chance in the world for her, really; her startled eyes, the pale thinness of her face, the drawn little-girl thinness of her neck. She ought to marry some nice boy who thought her lovelier than anything in the world, and forget her pathetic desire to be beautiful and grand. "But it's not your place to advise girls like her," the small monitor in her mind told her. "Get on with the money business."

So Marcia collected. Twenty from one girl, forty from another, the entire sum from eleven girls—one hundred and eighteen dollars each.

"Where did you get all this money?" she asked curiously, with conscious bad taste, of one girl, poorly dressed, with reddened, rough hands and a bad make-up —but with the possibilities of beauty and grace in her features and her carriage.

The girl flushed deeply.

"You have to know that?"

"No. I'm sorry."

"I'll tell you anyhow. I have been waiting on tables in a little restaurant just so I could get some money to go to Hollywood. But I thought maybe I'd better put my money in this. Then I can earn more and I'll know more, too."

"Thank you for telling me," Marcia said.

"You won't tell the others?"

"Of course not. And what if you have been waiting on tables? Nothing to be ashamed of in that, is there?"

"Well, no. Not a thing." The girl held her head

higher. "I've increased her confidence a little," Marcia thought. "I'm glad."

The money piled up on her desk. She used Hélène's paint box for a cash box, and she saw the figures grow on the tabulation she was making. She had, by the end of an hour, almost eleven hundred dollars in cash, in crumpled dollar bills, in checks signed by proud fathers and prouder mothers. A lot of money. And she could pay Mittner part of his money back, if he wanted it; she could give Hélène money to keep going on (and Hélène needed it; her shoes were run over, her best stockings had been darned several times); she could live and scrimp and keep the whole thing going. She might yet pull the school out of the slough. She might help find Doris and have a going concern to show her. Oh, she could forget Jerry in this, if she worked hard enough, if she struggled determinedly enough.

All at once she was glad that things were tangled, lowering, difficult; that would make her forget herself and what she wanted and the man she loved. That would help her be Marcia Talent again, the Marcia Talent she had taught herself to be before Jerry Kerrigan changed everything.

"All right," she said. "First lesson. Will one of you girls start the player piano? It's automatic—just put in any roll, it doesn't matter what."

The thin little girl took over that job. The heavy chords thundered in the room. "Anitra's Dance." Marcia did not know the music by name, but she had heard it many times; she thought, "Funny tune for these girls to move to." But it didn't matter.

"The first thing is to know how to walk," she said loudly. "I don't think any of you realize how few of you really know how to walk. Miss —— What is your name again?"

"Peggy—Peggy Bryan."

"Peggy, step out front. The rest of you line up on the stage. Two rows. Peggy, put this book on your head."

"What?"

"Put it on the top of your head and balance it and then walk straight from the stage toward me. Walk as though you didn't have the book there at all."

"I——"

"Put it on your head and walk."

The girl balanced the book inexpertly on her blond hair, started forward, moved to one side, then to the other, like a juggler, stumbled. The book crashed to the floor. The other girls started to laugh.

"Don't laugh," Marcia said sharply. "It's harder than you think. You—the girl in red—you try it."

The girl in red tried and she failed. Then the girl who said she had been a waitress said, "Let me try it."

She put the book on her head, walked toward Marcia, with a slow, easy, swinging carriage, perfectly erect, poised.

"Fine!" Marcia said. "Fine. Girls, see how she walked? That's the way a model ought to walk. I don't want any of you to try any of the things you see models do in movies. The really good model walks with perfect naturalness. But most girls learn walking habits that they think are smart looking or 'cute'—and forget to be natural. Do it again, will you?"

The girl who had been a waitress walked back and forth now, and Marcia could see that the girls on the stage were making notes, were remembering. One of them put her arms away from her sides in the careless motion the one-time waitress had.

"Carrying a tray makes you walk right. If you don't,

you get awful tired," the one-time waitress whispered to Marcia.

"I never thought of that," Marcia said. "You're doing beautifully."

So the lesson went on, for an hour, for two hours. It was a game to all of them—to Marcia as much as to any one of the girls. Lunch time was forgotten. Here was a contest: The habits of years against an ideal. And Marcia was a good teacher. She had never realized it. Women hated her instinctively—and now she saw why. They hated her because she could do things they could not, because when she put on a dress (a ready-made frock for fifteen dollars or a gown at one hundred and fifty dollars) it looked right on her body, because when she entered a room she made the others in the room feel awkward and gauche. But these girls were not hating her. They whispered together; she could tell they were talking about the stories in the newspapers, but also they were talking about her, they were learning from her. It never would have occurred to Marcia before to put it in this way, but the truth was that she was being kind to women in principle for the first time in her life. She always had thought of other women as her enemies, as women who had more things or more advantages than she had. Now she was interested in teaching these girls all she knew. And she was learning a thing that her earlier attitude toward life previously had kept her from learning.

"Miss Talent."

"Yes, Grace."

"It's two o'clock, Miss Talent. I'm kind of hungry. You think I could go out and get a sandwich?"

"Of course," Marcia was conscious-stricken. "I'm sorry, girls. I'm having so much fun I forgot about the time. You'd better all go out and get lunch. No

—make this all of the lesson for to-day. To-morrow morning at the same time?"

"Yes." They chorused agreement and approval and thanks. "You're a swell teacher, Miss Talent. You——"

A girl with dark blue pools for eyes came up and said, "You know, when I saw you the other day I didn't like you at all. But I like you a lot now." That touched Marcia more deeply than she would have admitted to anyone. She said only, "I'm glad, Joan. Come back to-morrow." And the girl said, "You bet I will. My folks said with that thing happening last night they didn't think I ought to come, but I'm going to tell them you're just all right and I'm going to keep on coming."

Then slowly, the girls left. They wanted to stay, to talk, to ask questions. But they were tactful, they realized that Marcia was troubled, involved in a strange mystery, not ready to talk about it. They went away, even saying good-by to the policeman, still immovable there beside the door.

## CHAPTER XXIX

THE policeman came inside the house on Superior Street.

"My name's Mead," he said to Marcia. "Tom Mead. They told me to stick around here."

"I'm glad to know you, officer. And thank you for helping."

"I didn't want to go and eat until you got through," he said. "You going to lunch now, Miss Talent?"

"Yes. Why don't we take lunch together?" she asked.

He was surprised and flattered.

"Swell. But I got a uniform on and——"

"What of it? I like uniforms."

So they had lunch together in the cool, smoothly decorous place on Michigan Avenue just above Superior Street, and polite waitresses and college-educated hostesses alike stared at the spectacle of a small, blond, almost stunningly beautiful girl and a tall, red-faced, bulky policeman sharing a luncheon table, laughing quietly, obviously good friends.

Then they went back to the school. "I'm worried about the other girl," Marcia told the policeman. "Hélène Goodman."

"Oh. She's the one that——"

"She was the designer. I hope she hasn't forgotten about it or decided it's too dangerous to be around here."

"Maybe she'll show up, miss. But you can't tell about

girls you meet like that. Most of 'em aren't so good. They quit if things get tough. Not like you."

"Thank you." She smiled up at him. "Don't you want to sit inside and be comfortable?"

"No, thank you. I better stand out here in front. Just in case things happen I want to be all set and on the job."

"That's right."

She opened the door. She saw something in the main room and quickly, quietly, before the policeman could notice, she closed the door behind her. Then she said to the figure bending over her desk, shuffling the bank notes and checks Marcia had left there in the paint box, forgotten. "Hello, Hélène. How are you to-day?"

The girl gasped, spun around, backed against the wall, still clutching bank notes in both hands, her face twisted with fear and greed.

"You—you—" She could not say anything coherent. She moved along the wall, toward the door.

Marcia knew, then, that if she had come back five minutes later, the money and Hélène Goodman would have been gone. But she did not betray what she knew. She said only, "Sorry I had to use your paint box, but there wasn't anything else to put the money in. Sit down, Hélène."

The girl did not speak. She edged toward the door again.

"Better sit down, Hélène. There's a policeman out there." Now there was steel back of the silk in Marcia's voice.

The girl turned paler, she sank back in the window seat, stared at the money in her hands, then relaxed, and the bills dropped to the floor in a green pile.

"I wasn't going to— You don't think I—I wasn't——"

"Of course you weren't. But you'd better put the money back in the box, hadn't you?"

There was hatred now in the girl's shallow eyes. But she scooped up the money, piled it back in the box, put the lid down with a slam.

"Well? What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing, Hélène. Just— Look here, Hélène. I want you to help me. Doris has disappeared and there's something terrible going on around this house. I know it. But we promised those girls—they paid their money for lessons and I want to go through with it. And I want to find Doris, and somehow I think if we close up this school we'll never find her. Won't you stay and help me?"

"No. I couldn't. I couldn't stay here. I want to—oh, let me go! Stop preaching at me and let me go! Go on and call in the cop if you want to. You can't prove anything. And I'll say that—that——"

"You'll say what, Hélène?"

"That you and Jack Grant framed the whole thing. You know where Doris Dean is right now. It's all a gag of yours, and you know it, and if I talk they'll put you in jail. And I've got as much right to this money as you have. It isn't yours. You didn't have any right to take it. You can't go on with the school."

"I'm going to, Hélène. Won't you help me?"

"No."

"Then——"

Marcia began counting bills.

"We were supposed to get fifty a week each as a drawing account," she said. "So here's a hundred dollars. Good-by, Hélène."

She sat down at the desk, not watching Hélène at all, and began to run through the notes she had made, revising a sentence here, changing a word there. She

heard a muffled sob, then another. Hélène was crying, with the terrible sobbing of the weak. She was begging for forgiveness with her tears, she was an actress even in her shame. But Marcia did not look at her, did not seem to hear. Then finally Hélène spoke.

"Marcia—I'm sorry. I—I'd like to help. Really I would. I'm—ashamed, Marcia. I just saw the money and I thought— Oh—" She burst into racking sobs again. "Marcia——"

Marcia stood up.

"You'll work for me?"

"Of course."

"And I can trust you—really trust you whether I'm here or not?"

"I promise. I hope to die if you can't trust me. I—I've learned my lesson."

Marcia looked at her. The weak, pointed face, the shallow eyes, the soft, cringing mouth— Hélène was not beautiful and there was no strength or honesty in her. She would always be servile to anyone stronger than she. She would always betray anyone if she thought in a moment of weak courage that she could gain something by turning traitor. But Marcia realized that someone to talk to and to have in the house with herself was a necessity. So she said, "All right. Better get busy on those dresses. I want a couple of them fixed for—" She began giving Hélène measurements. The black lace formal for the girl who had been a waitress. It would be the nicest dress that girl had ever worn, and she would be gorgeous wearing it. Having been taught something about her hair, about how to put on make-up, the girl would be beautiful without any effort. And the little pink frock for the girl with the eyes like dark blue pools. They would be good demonstration types, those two.

So Hélène set to work. Her hands were busy and clever; she cut, basted, sewed, with the ease of a natural modiste. And Marcia worked on and on over her notes. Then she took up the money.

"I'd better put this in the bank, hadn't I?" she asked at last.

"But the banks are closed. You couldn't do anything with it now."

"I'll ask the policeman."

She called Officer Mead inside.

"This is Miss Goodman, Mr. Mead."

"How are you?" he said gruffly.

"I've got all this money on my hands and I don't dare keep it overnight," Marcia said. "Could you advise me what to do with it?"

"It's too late for the banks," he said.

"Yes. Hélène told me that."

"But—I tell you. I'll turn it in at the station and have them keep it overnight. Then I'll bring it back in the morning and you can deposit it."

"Thank you."

She gave him the bundle of checks and currency, and a slip of paper with the total on it. She kept fifty dollars, and she handed the one hundred dollars in bills to Hélène. "You'd better take this. Maybe— Why don't you get some new things, Hélène? We've got to look smart. I'll tell you—there's a brown dress upstairs I've worn only once. It would look well on you. You can have it if you want it. And—get some shoes and things, will you?"

Fawning gratitude was in Hélène's eyes and in her words.

"Marcia, you're so awfully good to me. Thank you, Marcia. Thank you so much."

In half an hour, she was dressed and had gone.

"I'll be here early in the morning," she had promised as she went out. "You can count on me, Marcia."

"All right."

Then Marcia sat back and closed her eyes. Her head ached. The unaccustomed confinement, the long hours of steady, driving work, had tired her more than she knew. It was late—almost time for dinner. She ought to dress and go out. If she sat around too long she would begin to worry about Jerry, to think about him too much. And that must not be. Jerry Kerrigan was dead, so far as her life was concerned. He must not come back to life for her.

"Well," she said aloud—her voice reverberating oddly in the empty stillness of the room—"I might as well go up and take a shower and dress."

So she did. She undressed slowly, hung up her things, stepped under a warm shower. The needles of water lulled her nerves, made her suddenly tremendously sleepy. And she had slept so little last night. Odd, she had not realized how tired she was. She slipped into lingerie, put on a sports dress of tan linen, suddenly decided her shoes were not right for that dress, got a pair of low brogues from the closet, sat down to put them on. Her eyes closed in spite of herself. She lay back against the pillow, in a sort of warm, comfortable daze. The first day—the hardest day—was over. And she had got by, she had been really successful, the girls liked her, Hélène would help her now, she had money enough to keep the school going, she would—she would—she——

Quietly, like a small child, her lashes long on her cheeks, her blond hair rumpled across the silk pillow, Marcia Talent went to sleep. She slept although once the bell rang sharply downstairs, although in a few moments it rang again, long and insistently. She slept while darkness fell, while the street lamps winked on,

while the voices of people sitting on front stoops, inviting the cool breeze of evening, and the shouts of children rose, waned, died out altogether. She slept until it was past midnight, and the street was very still, with only the occasional low whirr of an automobile, an occasional final snatch of talk as someone came home, to break the quietness.

There was a faint single beam of light between the curtains at the window, nothing more. Marcia, her dress merging into the pale color of the bed cover, was almost invisible in the darkness. And there was no sound anywhere in the house.

Then there was an odd noise. Something creaked, like the opening of a warped window. There was a long pause. Then something creaked again. Then the soft padding sound of footfalls went through the house.

## CHAPTER XXX

BACK of the house on Superior Street there is a paved alley, with garages all along it. The shadows are deep there. Light does not come through from the street. The buildings along the alley are empty at night, and no one goes there. But now two shadows were immovable in the darkness alongside the garage just across the alley from the house on Superior Street. Those shadows whispered a little, now and then. Mostly, they watched the back of the house where Marcia Talent slept.

And there were other shadows. Something moved out of the wall in the room on the top floor of the house where Marcia slept. A part of the wall—a flat door—moved inward slowly, creaking. And the shadows came out from behind it. One, two, three, four. One struck a match and another shadow knocked the match from the hand that held it. There was a hissing protest. An answer. "No. You fool. No lights at all." Then the shadows moved across the room. They peered out of the narrow window.

There was a policeman in front of the house, walking slowly. They watched while he reached the end of the block, turned back, made the trip again, stood under the light. Then they saw him disappear in the all-night restaurant at the corner, a block away.

One of the shadows laughed shortly.

"Come on," the shadow said to the others. They went across the room, stealthily. Something creaked again.

Now one whole side of the wall came out. The wall toward the stair well was false. The searching policemen had been through the house the night before. They had searched everything. They had not found the room back of that wall. They had not measured the distance from wall to wall in the room, compared it with the width of other rooms. But back of this wall was a shallow room. And from floor to ceiling were cases of all sizes, packages, small kegs sheathed in straw. And the figures were busy with them. One by one, shouldering boxes, cases, kegs, they disappeared through the door in the opposite wall. They came back, they shouldered new burdens, they disappeared again. The pile decreased. Still there were scores of packages, of cases. A man slipped, almost fell. Another man caught him, cursed him softly. "Fool! Watch your step!" The first man muttered something, disappeared with his load. It was like a dream of slaves, carrying staggering loads, coming back again. Or stevedores at night on a wharf. But there was no light at all except the single faint beam through the narrow window.

One man stood back, silent, moving little, except to hurry the other men now and then, to whisper excitedly. Occasionally, one of the men would peer out of the window again. There was no one on the street. The policeman, waiting for ham and eggs at the corner restaurant, would not be back on guard for twenty minutes. They had time, if they hurried.

So the men filed into the door in the wall. They reappeared again suddenly, out of nowhere, in the basement. Here they merged with the darkness, went up the basement steps, went out into the small back yard with the high brick walls.

The men across the alley, listening, intent, heard all this movement, waited tensely. But no one came out.

There was a small gate in the wall of the yard, but it did not open.

The men across the alley heard a new sound. This came from the two-story brick garage next to the yard on the left. People were moving there, too. The listeners heard guttural voices, an occasional thump as a heavy load was set down, then moved. They came out of the shadow a little to hear better. Then they stepped back. One of them said suddenly, "Marcia!" and started out across the alley, but the other caught his arm, drew him back.

"Wait! You haven't got a gun. Don't go in yet. Wait!"

So they waited, and the procession went on inside the house where Marcia still slept. A figure picked up a load from the hidden room on the third floor, disappeared through the door, reappeared briefly in the basement, appeared in the yard, and then, bending low, crouching under the burden, moved through an opening and into the garage next door to the yard. By daylight, in ordinary times—since the wall was built—this had been a basement light, covered with an iron grating. Now the grating was off, and there were wooden steps leading down into the opening, into the garage basement.

The procession went on and on for minutes, and the shadows waited across the alley, silent now and troubled, afraid that at any moment there might be a scream—Marcia, screaming from that house across the way.

Or she might not be there at all. The newspapers had printed the story and Jerry Kerrigan, out of hospital, hurrying to meet the man who was his best friend in the world, had read about it, had forgotten how Marcia had hurt him, had forgotten everything but that she was in danger. And when he met the man—when his father, tall as himself, with iron-gray hair, with a face seamed

by sun and weather, with glinting gray eyes like his son's—seized his hand in a crushing grip, shouted, "Son! You're all right? You're sure you're all right?" and then, "We'll take you home to-day," he had answered, "You wont take me anywhere. I've got work to do." And he had told his father all about Marcia. "She doesn't love me. She's going to marry an old man. I don't know why. I don't understand. I thought—well, I kept believing—" He couldn't say any more. But his father was a strong man, a good friend. He clapped his son on the shoulder. "Anyhow, you want to be sure she's all right. That's it?" He answered, "I've got to. I couldn't leave—even with things the way they are—unless I was sure. Dad! You'd help me?" The old man from the ranches, from the West—the man who had killed rustlers, fought Indians, not so many years ago—grinned. "Of course. Let's go see her."

So they had hunted her. They had gone to the hotel where she lived.

"Checked out," the clerk said laconically. "Left this morning."

"Where'd she go?"

"How should I know? Got married or something."

He would not believe it. He tried the police then. They said there was a guard at the house, but the girl wasn't staying there. No, they hadn't found Jack Grant. No. Wait a minute. Maybe Tom Mead knew something about the girl—Officer Tom Mead. He'd been on duty there all day. They could call him on the telephone. They called. But he was out. "Gone to a movie," a voice told them. "Don't know what one." So Jerry Kerrigan made his father wait with him, until finally they reached Officer Tom Mead, until they found from him that Marcia Talent was in the house on Superior Street.

So they had gone to the house, to ring, to get no answer, to study the dark windows, to ring again, to start away. Then Jerry Kerrigan had said sharply, suddenly, "There's something funny going on here. Come on. I want to look at the back yard again." So finally they had gone into the alley, and as they waited there a car swung into view, its lights out, and turned into the garage. And another. And another. And they heard people arguing in low voices, heard a woman's voice.

"Marcia?"

"No."

"Son—you're sure that girl isn't mixed up in this?"

"I know she isn't. She wouldn't be mixed up in anything crooked."

"You're sure, son?"

"I'd swear to it, dad."

"All right. We'll stick around a while. Maybe something will break."

Jerry Kerrigan smiled, the smile hidden by the darkness. The fighting blood was up in his father—in the old man who had worn two guns once and had used them well. They were together then; if there was a fight there would be two men from the West, not one, against whatever danger there was.

They waited. And the procession went on. And still Marcia Talent slept.

Yet into her untroubled sleep there came the regular beat of drums, of tom-toms. The drums purred, were silent, purred again, loudly. Then there was one great roar of the drums and Marcia was awake.

She lay looking up at the ceiling, swimming in a warm pool of half sleep, half wakefulness. There was a noise. At first she could not resolve this noise into anything tangible at all. Then she knew what it was.

Somebody was walking past the head of her bed. But

that was not possible. There was no one in the room. Her eyes turned quickly to the right, to the left. No one. She got up, trembling, her knees weak. No. There wasn't anything at all in the room. But still the footsteps went past her bed. One, two, three, four, five. Beginning loudly, fading out into silence. Beginning again.

She drove the drug of sleep out of her brain. She looked around wildly. Nothing in the room. She could not have used a gun if there had been one. She could not do anything. But there were people in this house. Not in the room, not on the stairway, but in the house. People who must be carrying things, for they walked slowly, put down their feet heavily. Once she thought she heard someone speak.

She ran to the door of her room, listened. Above, at the head of her third-floor stairs, she could hear people moving, she heard things bang softly, and all at once she heard a voice she knew as well as any voice in the world. The blond woman was speaking.

"All right. That's the last. Get going!"

And the procession past the head of her began again. One, two, three, four, five.

What could she do? She ran to the window. There was no one on the street. There was supposed to be a policeman. She looked up and down the street. He was not in sight anywhere.

Then suddenly Marcia was icy cold, her fear was gone. Those people—they knew where Doris Dean was. They had Doris Dean with them somewhere. They could lead the way to Doris. And she must follow. No time to get help, to cry out for anyone. She must follow.

She kicked off her shoes, crept on stocking feet to the foot of the stairs leading to the third floor, started up. One step at a time. A step, and listen, and another step.

The stairs seemed miles long. It seemed she would never reach the top. And now there was no sound from that room, but somewhere inside the house, faintly, from far off—as she had heard Doris Dean's last cry—she heard footsteps moving slowly, heavily.

She caught her breath. She ran headlong up the last five steps, turned, sped into the room.

One wall was gone. And back of it was emptiness. A few boards. A few shreds of straw. Nothing else.

There was a door in the other wall. A door so cleverly jointed into the paneling that no one had suspected it. A door so beautifully constructed that rapping on the walls, searching every inch of the room, had not betrayed its existence. But it was there. And it was open. A black cave was disclosed beyond the door. Out of the cave came faint noises—the sound of people a long way off, moving slowly, carrying burdens.

She waited. Had she courage enough to go into that cave? Could she do anything, help anyone, if she did? She could not. No. She turned to leave the room, to race out of this place, to race down the stairs and out on to the street where she would be safe, where no one could touch her.

No. She held her fingers closed into her palms so tightly that the nails hurt her flesh. No. This was her job. If anything had happened, it was her job to learn what she could, to solve this mystery.

She forced herself across the room. It took every ounce of courage Marcia Talent had—courage she had never known she possessed, courage that drove her finally through that door. And on to the first step of a long staircase that led down into such blackness as she had never imagined. The musty smell of damp places, of underground, came to her, and from far below she heard a door slam suddenly, loudly. She jerked back. Then

she bit her lip, she clenched her fists, she drew herself up desperately, fighting for control. She began to walk down the steps.

This stairway was wide, it descended gracefully. It was not steep. It was built of stone. It was old. The stone was cold and damp under her stockinged feet. And the stairs led on and on. She had gone down fifteen steps. Then she must be just back of her room. She had heard steps on the stairs as they passed her room.

She went on. She must have passed the first floor, now. She must——

She crashed suddenly into an iron door, closed in front of her, icy to her touch. She felt blindly along its edges for a knob, for some sort of handle. Her hands closed on a long lever. She tugged at this, vainly at first, then with a sudden desperate exertion of strength that pulled the lever up.

The door opened. She stepped out into the basement, and the furnace was directly in front of her. And across the basement she saw light.

The basement door that led to the outside had been padlocked. She had seen the big brass padlock there no longer ago than yesterday. Now the door stood open. And she ran forward, past the pillars, to the foot of the steps.

She heard, outside, a man's voice talking rapidly.

She stopped at the head of the steps.

She saw the yard, the opening in the wall into the garage. She heard a car roar suddenly, then another. And she heard Doris Dean's voice. She heard Doris Dean scream wildly once, twice, and she heard somebody shout, "Stop her! Gag her!" Then she raced across the yard, through the opening, into the garage. And as she entered it, one car, a second, a third, roared out of the opening into the alley, and away.

## CHAPTER XXXI

MARCIA stumbled forward, after the cars, crying, "Doris! Doris!" She was in the alley, running after the cars, and she saw in a sort of blur faces that looked back through the faint light. Then the cars moved faster. The first was already at the end of the alley, turning south.

She ran swiftly forward, stopped, screamed, turned to run. And the two shadows seized her.

"Marcia! Oh—Marcia! Darling! Darling!"

This thing was unbelievable. It could not happen, it was not real. But Jerry Kerrigan held her in his arms. Jerry picked up her small body, held her, started to run after the cars. And the other man pounded along beside them.

"No use, son. Can't get 'em now. Stop it."

Jerry said only through clenched teeth, "Come on."

As they reached the end of the alley on St. Clair Street they saw the three cars, close together, speeding south toward the river. Jerry set Marcia on her feet, steadied her with one strong arm, looked around wildly. As he looked, a cruising, late-wandering taxicab swung from Superior on to St. Clair and Jerry shouted, "Here! Quick."

The cab halted beside them, the door swung open, the driver stared at two men who tossed a girl into the car, climbed in after her, shouted at him, "Follow those cars ahead. It's life or death."

"But I——"

"Get after them!" Jerry snapped.

The driver let in the clutch, stamped down on the accelerator. The big taxicab leaped forward. And Jerry's father was forgotten, everything was forgotten for a moment but that Marcia was held tightly in Jerry's arms. Then, quite naturally, without any thought of anything or memory of anything, they kissed each other.

"My dear! Oh, my very dearest." His arms held her very tightly, his eyes looked into hers, he held her closely. And Marcia kissed him.

"Jerry! You came back. I knew you would. I knew."

"I love you."

"I love you, Jerry."

They kissed again. So the thing that should have been said and was not and the kiss that should have been given but was not were real at last and they were together. It did not matter if the car was roaring ahead, if Jerry's father stared at them with an odd glance of humor and understanding, if Jack Grant and the blond woman and Doris Dean were racing along in front of them—it did not matter if the world came to an end.

Then Marcia remembered.

"Jerry! Not now. No. Who——"

She looked at the strange man.

"That's dad," Jerry said simply. "Dad, this is Marcia."

The grim-faced man smiled suddenly.

"Hello, daughter," he said. "That's right, isn't it? Hello."

He took one of her hands in his great paw.

"Now—" He motioned with his head.

They swung west from St. Clair, the car rocketed around a turn, they were on Michigan Avenue now, on the lower level, racing toward the bridge. Mail trucks,

fruit trucks, were here and there. A few splashes of light from buildings. And ahead, the three cars.

"They don't dare shoot. And we can't. We haven't got anything to shoot with. What do we do now?"

"Turn off," Jerry called suddenly to the driver. "Turn west."

The car turned west on Illinois Street, started forward.

"Keep going. Turn north on Rush."

They went north on Rush as far as Grand.

"Stop!"

Jerry leaped out, Marcia following, his father behind them. Jerry tossed a five-dollar bill to the driver.

"Come on!"

He started to race back down Rush Street, tugging Marcia with him, his father hurrying after, through the darkness, past a single startled loiterer on a corner, past old buildings, south.

"Jerry! What's the idea?"

"They stopped across the bridge. Maybe they've gone on. Maybe they haven't. But I've got a hunch. Come along."

He did not know that Marcia's stockinged feet were bruised and bleeding now, nor did she. Those people must be followed, must be caught. There were no policemen to turn to. It would be no use to cry out for help. Those three—Jerry and Marcia and Jerry's father—must do anything that was done.

They ran past the Wrigley Building to the water front, and Jerry shot out suddenly, "Back!" They shrank against the building. He pointed.

Across the river, close in under the bridge, was a low white boat. And on the lower level, as near the water's edge as they could be driven, were the three cars. Men raced back and forth, carrying packages, dropping

them into the boat, carrying more. And a woman was with them, and two men came from a car with a bundle which tugged and twisted, which they stuffed into the boat's cabin, following it.

"Doris!" Jerry said.

They stared at each other. What now?

"Wait," Jerry's father said. "Wait here."

"No. Come on around the building."

They ran north to the first corner, turned east, ran to the lower level, turned south, came out on the wharf, huddled behind the stone balustrade. Here they crouched, Marcia close to Jerry, his arm around her, his father kneeling beside them, his eyes intent and fiery.

"We'll get 'em," he said. "We——"

The boat's motor began to bark. Men ran back to the cars, got in. The cars moved away. Now the boat swung out into the river in a slow arc. They could see a tall man at the wheel.

"Grant!"

"Of course."

Then, "My boat's down there under the bridge. Let's go."

So the wildest chase Tom Kerrigan had ever seen —a wilder chase than any after Indians or cattle rustlers in the pioneer times—began.

Jerry swung Marcia into the seat beside him, leaped in, his father jumping into the seat behind. Jerry stepped down on the starter. The motor barked, coughed, roared into a loud frenzy. And as the white boat swung down the river, west, Jerry's boat swung after it, cleaving the water with wild lunges, throwing a great wave on each side of the prow.

The white boat was two blocks ahead. It was fast. It swung in a wide arc beneath the Clark Street bridge.

"The north branch," Marcia said, shouting against the

roar of the motor. "You can't go there. You don't know the river."

"I can." He swung the wheel hard over. The boat reeled sickeningly, caught an even keel, sped on.

Now they roared under the first drawbridge, they swung past warehouses, low, black buildings. The first faint light of coming dawn was over everything. And the white boat sped on.

Something cracked. A man in the stern of the boat ahead, kneeling, was firing. Rat-tat-tat-tat! Glass leaped. A wide, jagged hole was ripped through the windshield of Jerry's boat. Marcia gasped and Jerry swung her down beneath the cowl with one arm.

"Get 'em, son! Ride 'em!"

His father stood up in the rear seat, his hair flying in the wind, shaking his fist at the boat ahead, shouting, "Go on! Get 'em!"

The boat seemed to gain on the white boat, seemed to jump at it, plunging like a mad horse. And Jerry leaned far forward, his face glowing, his eyes like knives.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat! A little line of splashes ran across the water beside them. Rat-tat-tat! A long furrow scarred the bright mahogany. Jerry reeled for a second, caught himself, said, "Bad boy!" grinned. And Marcia, looking up, forgot Doris Dean, forgot everything but that this was Jerry Kerrigan. Her man. And he was hurt. A red line marked his forehead. It grew.

"Jerry! Stop! Stop now!"

"No."

The boat plunged on.

Northwest and still northwest, the boats roared like demons. Great swirling wakes leaped behind them as they spun around the twisting curves. And suddenly the white boat headed in toward shore, ran alongside the wharf, stopped.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

Jerry drove his boat straight at the beach, dropped his hands from the wheel, stood up, seized Marcia in his arms.

"Get set, dad!"

There was a rending, roaring crash. They were hurled forward, headlong. Marcia felt only a sudden blow. Then she felt nothing at all. Then she was awake again, tumbling across the rotted, wooden wharf, struggling to her feet into a maelstrom of battle.

It had been ten years since Tom Kerrigan had hit a man on the chin. But now his great fist rapped Jack Grant and the gray-haired man dropped as though he had been shot. And father and son went forward side by side, fists swinging, roaring a strange battle song without words, slugging, stumbling, throwing bodies away from them.

"Beat it! The cops!"

The men before them began to run, scattered, were lost in the darkness of the warehouse. One stumbled and Tom Kerrigan was on him, dragging him upright, lugging him back with one mighty arm clasped around the captive's throat. Another dropped to one knee, came up with something flashing. A knife. Jerry caught the man's arm, twisted suddenly. There was a wild, animal scream.

Then something struck Marcia. Arms were around her, hands were beating her, clawing her, a woman's voice shrieked at her. She fought back instinctively, her small weight opposed to a woman twice her size. She went stumbling backward, fell against a wall, tried to get up. Could not.

But Jerry caught the woman. Jerry pinned her arms expertly behind her back, held her, kicked suddenly at

Jack Grant's shins, and the gray-haired man dropped again. And then the police had them.

Three officers with short guns pointed and ready herded Jack Grant and the blond woman and the other two captives against the wall, held them, listened to Jerry Kerrigan's quick, blazing story. One dropped back, climbed on to the white boat, shouted suddenly, "She's here!" Tom Kerrigan helped him as he came back on to the wharf carrying Doris Dean, bound, gagged, unconscious.

Then Marcia, murmuring something no one could understand—save for Jerry's name—slumped down in a heap.

## CHAPTER XXXII

MARCIA was in her own bed. This was the room on Superior Street and she should not be here. She should be on the old wooden wharf by the river, stumbling, watching Jerry fighting, watching his father, seeing the blond woman come at her with arms flailing.

She shook her head slightly, opened her eyes again.

"Jerry!"

He did not say anything. There were tears on his cheeks and it was funny to see Jerry cry. He looked so funny with tears running out of his eyes. She laughed. The laugh seemed to come from a long way off and it wasn't a very funny laugh. She tried to stop laughing. She put out her hand, slowly. Her hand seemed very heavy.

She touched his cheek.

"Jerry! Jerry!"

She couldn't think of anything else to say. But—"Jerry!"

He took her in his arms, very gently, raising her as though she were a small child. He thought, "She is a child. A little child and she's gone through all this, she's all right, she's all right!" He kissed her. Once. Again. Then she kissed him. Then both of them began to laugh, tenderly, lightly, with their arms tight around each other.

"Mine!"

"Of course, Jerry. Always. I always was."

The room seemed to grow brighter. It was broad

daylight. There were other people in the room. She puzzled out the faces. Jerry's father. And he was smiling. He wasn't angry at her. He didn't hate her for being Marcia Talent. He came toward them. He put out a big hand, awkwardly, patted her hand.

"Daughter!"

Then everything must be all right. Then he didn't mind because she loved Jerry, because Jerry loved her. He didn't——

"Jerry! My dearest! My dearest!"

She was crying a little bit. That was silly. There wasn't anything to cry about. She was all right now and Doris—Doris——

She jerked back suddenly, sat up, her eyes wide and terrified.

"Doris! Where is she?"

"Right here, baby."

Doris stepped out of the shadow near the door.

"Right here—thanks to you. You—oh, you sweet kid—" Doris held Marcia's hand. "You're pretty marvelous," she said. She turned away.

So they explained the rest of the story.

Grant? In jail. And the blond woman? She was his wife. She had been in the racket with him. The racket? Yes. Grant took over the house next door and this house. He found out this house had an old stairway and he opened it up. It had been a servant's stair from the third-floor rooms to the basement. He was a liquor dealer of an odd kind. He sold only choice liquors at stiff prices. He stored a fortune in cointreaus and brandies and bacardi and absinthe in the room back of the false wall in the third-floor room. He brought the stuff in through the garage and the hole in the back yard wall. He got the idea of starting the models' school as a blind, believing no one ever would suspect him if he had such

protection. But he was invading territory that did not belong to him and other bootleggers went to war against him. And he found he must get the stuff out of the house, get it away to a new hiding place. So his men had been at work, carrying away the stock, when Doris wakened, heard the steps back of her wall, went to investigate, blundered into the third-floor room to be seized by the blond woman and one of the men, carried down the stairs, kept in an empty second-floor room in the garage. They had planned to get ransom for her return. But they had wanted to get the liquors away first. And——

"The little girl in his office?" Marcia asked.

"That was right—Grant helped her father get away from prison and he made the girl work for him. She knew about the house up here and she wanted to tell you girls—get you out of it. But the woman said if she did Grant would turn her father back."

"Oh! She's all right now?"

"Yes."

"And Grant?"

"He'll do quite a long stretch," a policeman volunteered over Jerry's shoulder. "Transporting and so on. And there's a murder charge against him in what the woman told us. She lost her nerve. She talked."

"Oh!" Marcia said again.

Marcia turned to Jerry. "I'm all right, Jerry. I want to get up. Right away."

"No. You lie still, dearest. You—" He turned toward the other people. They smiled understandingly, began to file out of the room. Except for Jerry and his father. And for another figure. Marcia had not noticed this figure before.

Mittner!

He had come because he loved her, because she was

going to marry him. She had promised to marry him, but she loved Jerry and he must know it now; he knew everything. But—she had promised. And—the whole thing rushed back into her mind, striking at her, taunting her. She was Marcia Talent and Jerry was not the man she could marry. She could bring him nothing. No background. No money. Nothing. His father was a good man, a kind man and he loved Jerry. And he was being nice to her now because Jerry loved her. But she couldn't hurt Jerry. She couldn't hurt his father. She couldn't hurt Jim Mittner. She——

"Jim! Please."

"Yes, Marcia."

He stood over her. A little fat man with a pudgy, weary face. A little fat man who had made a lot of money and who knew that his money had done nothing for him, who was alone in the world and would always be alone.

"Hello." He smiled broadly. He winked. "Quite an evening, wasn't it?"

"I— She could not go on. There was Jerry, his lean face intent and adoring. There was his father. There was Jim Mittner. "I—" The words died in her throat.

But Jim Mittner smiled.

"I've heard a lot about you," he said to Jerry. "My name's Mittner. I want to congratulate you. And you, sir. She's a nice girl. She'll be a good wife to you, Mr. Kerrigan. And—" he looked down at her again. His eyes were pathetic. But there was a smile on his face and he held his head up. He was a brave little fat man and he had always been a good loser and now he was a better sportsman than he had ever been before. "Good luck, Marcia. All the luck in the world." He took her hand, shook it gravely, turned away quickly. "Have a cigar with me, Mr. Kerrigan?" he took Jerry's father

by the arm, he turned him toward the door. "I got good cigars. I wish you'd try one with me."

He disappeared through the door, Jerry's father, tall and a little amused, beside him. He put his hand back, closed the door. He went down the stairs gallantly, like a small comical toy.

And Jerry took Marcia in his arms again.

"Jerry!"

"Marcia! Darling!"

After quite a long time, Marcia spoke.

"But I shouldn't marry you, Jerry. I'm—nothing at all. I— Oh, Jerry, you could find someone so much better. You could. You know you could."

He shook his head slowly, gravely.

"I found you, my dear. That's all I'll ever ask of the world."

She closed her eyes, she nestled in his arms, she sighed very softly. Marcia Talent was not afraid of anything in the world now. She felt that she never would be afraid again as long as she lived.

THE END

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